MONEY, LOVE AND KATE

Together with

THE STORY OF A NICKEL

ELEANOR·H·PORTER

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TOGETHER WITH

THE STORY OF A NICKEL

ELEANOR H. PORTER

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By ELEANOR H. PORTER

AUTHOR OF

"Pollyanna," "Cross Currents," "The Story of Marco," etc.

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MONEY, LOVE AND KATE

MONEY, LOVE AND KATE

A SNOWBALL OF THE FATES

At play one day, the Fates fashioned a snowball and laughed to see it grow. A boy, a man, a maid, a legacy, another man, and other maids—all these the Fates called "snow" and rolled up together. The Fates you see, were playing.

CHAPTER I

The Ball's Inception

WITH a sigh John Newcomb pulled out his last five-dollar bill and eyed it frowningly. Then he stuffed it back into his pocket and went downstairs to partake of soggy biscuits, tough beefsteak, and chicory coffee. Poor as it was—that breakfast—he was yet thankful that for three more mornings it (or one like it) would be his; luckily, his board was paid until Saturday night.

In the dining-room of the shabby-genteel Beacon Hill boarding-house John Newcomb found the other boarders already gathered, but he barely nodded to them as he sat down and ate his meal in moody silence.

John Newcomb was not his usual cheery, talkative self that morning. He refused to discuss politics with the red-haired bookkeeper at his right, and he vouchsafed not so much as a word in contribution to the general anathemas heaped upon the unusually hot weather for June. He even let pass with a mere shrug and a faint smile the challenging sallies of the pretty stenographer across the table. John Newcomb's mind was quite otherwise occupied. He was still thinking of that lone five-dollar bill in his pocket, and of what lay behind it, and of what—to all appearances—lay ahead of it.

After breakfast, as usual, he started out to look for work. Also, as usual, he did not find it. At noon, tired, exasperated, and more discouraged than he had ever before been in his life, he strolled dejectedly into the Common and sat down on one of the benches.

Five, ten, fifteen minutes he sat there, his hat pulled far down over his eyes, his hands thrust into his pockets. An inquisitive squirrel, as if eager for possible nuts, crept along the back of the bench and waited expectantly. Another, not quite so venturesome, eyed him from the edge of the path three feet away. A third, more bold than either of the others, leaped to the seat of the bench and whisked his impertinent tail almost under the man's very nose.

"Well, well! Oh, it's you, is it?" cried John Newcomb, suddenly arousing himself.

At his start of surprise six pairs of little feet scampered to a point of safety three yards away. Then, almost as rapidly, they came back again; the man had taken from his pocket a handful of peanuts.

"Oh, yes, I brought them," he nodded. "I didn't

forget you. Come on, you little rascals and eat your dinner. I hope it'll taste good to you. I broke my last five-spot to give it to you, anyhow," he finished under his breath, with a shrug.

From Tremont Street a man came hurrying; but his steps lagged perceptibly as he passed the group on the park bench. Another man stopped frankly and watched for a minute. So, too, did a young couple, and a boy, and two girls. Others, hastening across from Tremont Street, smiled and almost nodded as they passed; for so many noons had they seen this young fellow feeding the squirrels at this hour that they almost felt they knew him.

At last there came a wistful-eyed small boy with a parcel done up in a red bandanna and suspended across his shoulders by a short stick. For a long minute he watched the squirrels hungrily, then he came timidly forward and touched the man's shoulder.

"If you please, Mister, would ye mind playin' I was a squirrel an' give me two or three o' them nuts?" he asked in a low voice.

"Eh? What?" demanded John Newcomb, turning in surprise. "Well, well! What's this? Who are you, son?"

"I'm not a son. I'm not anybody's son," returned the boy, with odd fierceness. "But I *am* hungry," he admitted, a swift change coming to face and voice, "hungrier, I guess, than them squirrels be. I've been watchin' 'em," he finished wistfully.

"So? Well, now, that's too bad! I'm afraid they're 'most gone," regretted the man, diving his hands into his pockets and producing only half a dozen nuts. "But never mind, we'll have these. And while we eat them, suppose you sit down here

with me and tell me all about it," he suggested, making room for the boy at his side.

With prompt eagerness the boy obeyed. The next minute his slim brown fingers and small white teeth were making short work of demolishing the scanty pile of nuts.

The two were quite by themselves now. The curious on-lookers had vanished—there was nothing at all exciting about watching a *small boy* eat peanuts! Even the squirrels themselves, seemingly aware that there was nothing more for them, had made off with a final disgruntled flourish of their tails.

"Well," said John Newcomb, when the six nuts were gone, "how about it?"

"Bang up! Yes, sir. Thanks. Only I wish I'd got here sooner, that's all."

"Still hungry?"

"Oh, yes, sir; 'course."

"Hm-m; well, we'll see about that later, perhaps. Meanwhile, it might be handy to know what to call you. Wouldn't it?"

"Yes, sir." The boy smiled, but he stirred uneasily and gave the man a quick sidewise glance. As he did not say anything further, the man hazarded:

"And what did you say your name was?"

There was a brief hesitation, then, a bit explosively from the boy:

"I didn't say, Mister. But, it's Tommy—except when folks is cross, then it's Thomas."

"Oh, I see. Very good," nodded the man. "Well, then, *Tommy*," he went on with smiling emphasis, "and what is the rest of the name?"

To his surprise the boy uptilted his chin aggressively.

"I ain't usin' that name no more just now, sir," he answered coldly.

"Eh? What? Why not?"

"Because I don't want to."

The man whistled softly.

"Little bit independent, aren't we, eh? Don't you like the name?"

Again was the man surprised. This time the boy's answer came in a voice that almost broke with a sob.

"Oh, yes sir; but—I ain't usin' it. That's all."

For a moment there was silence. The man was studying the boy rather closely through half-shut eyes.

"Hm-m," he murmured. Then, adopting new tactics:

"Traveled far to-day, young man?"

"Some. But not so much as yesterday an' the day before. I've been lookin' for work."

"Oh, indeed! Find it?"

"Not yet. But I shall to-morrer, I guess." Mingled hope and fear vibrated through the boy's voice.

The man smiled—but he sighed, too.

"Of course! We all say that," he muttered with a shrug. Then he fell silent, his eyes modily fixed on space.

It was the determinedly cheerful voice of the boy that roused him.

"The country ain't no place for a man to find work, anyhow, so I struck out for the city."

John Newcomb turned sharply.

"Work—you? Why, my boy, you can't work! Where did you come from, anyhow?"

The boy got to his feet abruptly.

"Thank ye, sir, for the nuts, an'—good-bye. I guess I better be gettin' on now."

"Oh, but see here, you're forgetting the luncheon we were going to have! You know I said we'd attend to that a little later."

"I know; but——" The boy stopped and turned wistful eyes over his shoulder.

"Nonsense! Of course we're going to have something to eat," declared the man, springing to his feet. "Come on. I know just the place."

A little later, with a steaming hot dish of baked beans on the small table between them, John Newcomb said briskly:

"Now, Tommy, own up. It's a case of runaway from home, isn't it? You see I know—because I did the same thing myself."

"Say! Did ye do it, too,—honest Injun?" cried the boy, plainly forgetting, in his joy at discovering a "pal," that his own secret was a secret no longer.

"Yes. And now let's hear all about *your* runaway," smiled John Newcomb, reaching for a piece of brown bread.

The young face opposite settled into stubborn lines.

"I'm much obliged for the beans, Mister, truly; but I ain't tellin' about myself jes' now."

"But I should think you might—to me—as long as I ran away, too," coaxed the man.

For a moment Tommy considered this gravely.

"Well, maybe. How old was ye when ye went?"

"Twelve."

"Gee! Say, now, was ye? So'm I." The boy's face was alight. "What did *you* go for?"

"Wanted to see what there was the other side of the big hill."

"Did ye find out?"

"I'm sorry to say I did, Tommy," sighed the man.

"Didn't ye like it—what was there?"

John Newcomb laughed, though a little sadly.

"See here, son, this isn't telling about *your* runaway," he reminded the boy.

Again the small chin opposite was lifted aggressively.

"Mister, please, I ain't your son, though—as I said before—I'm much obliged for the beans, an' they're bang-up. But I ain't anybody's son—now."

"Which means that you were somebody's son *once*, eh? Now, come, come, my boy, don't you think you'd feel a little better to tell me all about it?" urged the man. It had not been lost on John Newcomb that Tommy's garments, though dirty, were whole and of good quality.

For a time there was silence; then Tommy drew a long sigh.

"Maybe, Mister, considerin' the beans, I ought to tell ye this much. I have run away, but I ain't goin' back an' ye needn't try ter make me. I've hung all my wordly goods across my shoulder and I've started out ter make my fortune. I'm goin' ter make it too," finished the boy stoutly.

John Newcomb gave his head a sad little shake.

"But that's what *I* said, boy; and—I haven't made it yet."

"Hain't ye got—*any* money. The boy's worried eyes sought his face anxiously, then dropped to the plate of beans, now nearly empty.

"Oh, you needn't worry. I can pay my bill here. I've got—that!" smiled the man, displaying two or three bills and some change.

"Is that all?"

"Yes," said the man; then he gave an odd, short laugh. "Oh, there is a little matter of thirty thousand dollars, I believe, Tommy, that would be mine, if I did one thing—which I'm not going to do." He said the last as if to himself, and almost under his breath, but Tommy's ears were sharp.

"Why not?" he questioned.

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"I shall have to answer you as you did me, Tommy, I guess. 'Because I don't want to.'"

There was another long silence. John Newcomb's eyes again were moodily fixed on space.

Tommy, the last bean gone together with the last crumb of brown bread, stirred restlessly then slipped from his chair.

"Thank ye, Mister. Them beans was great. An' now I guess I'll be goin'."

With a start the man roused himself, and reached for his check.

"Going? Where?"

"To get work, sure."

"Where are you going to stay to-night?"

Tommy frowned slightly.

"Well, I ain't jes' sure about that; but I guess it will be where I get the work. I'll stay there."

"Hm-m, I guess you will—just about there," nodded John Newcomb, as if to himself. Then to Tommy: "See here, my boy, I'm going to look for work, too. Suppose we go together. Eh?" he finished, rising to his feet.

Tommy reflected, his head on one side. Then he spoke.

"No, sir, thank ye, sir. I wouldn't want to do that. Ye see, if *I* got the job and you didn't you'd feel bad; and I wouldn't want ter cut ye out—not after them beans."

John Newcomb choked a laugh into a cough.

"Thank you, Tommy," he said gravely, as they left the restaurant, "then suppose we call it that if you don't get work, with a good place to stay to-night, you'll meet me at five o'clock at the same bench in the Common where we met this noon. Will you do that?"

"Oh, yes, sir, thank ye, sir. I'll do that," promised Tommy. "But I don't think I'll be there," he added with cheerful confidence as he slung the stick with his bundle across his shoulder and turned away.

Through narrowing lids John Newcomb watched him out of sight.

"Well, I've done the best that I could for him—independent little tike that he is," mused the man, a bit uneasily. "But—oh, well, I'll see him again, all right—no danger," he finished as he, in turn, moved away.

Some hours later, therefore, not greatly to his surprise, John Newcomb found a very discouraged small boy waiting at the appointed bench in the Common.

"Well, how goes it? Did you get that job?" asked the man with a cheeriness that ignored the answer already written on the boy's face.

"No, sir, I—I didn't." Tommy's voice was not quite steady.

"No? Well, Tommy, I didn't either," sighed the

man. "I'm afraid I've not got much use for the world, nor the world for me—to-night."

"No, sir, I hain't neither," retorted Tommy, with a choke in his voice. "Not a might of use for this old world."

"Tut, tut! That's no way to talk," demurred the man.

"Why, Mister, ye jes' said it yourself!"

"Eh? What? Well, maybe I did," laughed John Newcomb, shamefacedly, "but it sounds different, somehow, when *you* say it. Now, come, suppose you go home with me to-night, as long as you haven't any job, you know, and we'll do a little more talking and planning."

If John Newcomb had had in his mind any hopes or schemes of, by these means, immediately restoring this small runaway boy to his friends, he had them no longer after the boy's reply.

"Well, Mister, I'll tell yer," began Tommy, slowly, "if you'll promise not ter ask me why I ran away, and if ye won't try ter get me ter go back, I'll come and be glad ter,—awful glad."

And John Newcomb promised as, obviously, he could do nothing else.

Thus it happened that when John Newcomb entered the dining-room of the shabby-genteel boarding-house that night, he was accompanied by a small boy who ate a prodigious dinner in spite of the fact that he seemed always to be looking about him with wide-eyed wonder and in spite, too, of the fact that the red-haired bookkeeper and the pretty stenographer were asking all sorts of questions concerning him with their eyes—and not a few with their lips. Thus it also happened that sometime later, when John Newcomb laid himself down beside that same

small boy, the boy's eyes closed in sound sleep while his own eyes were wide awake.

John Newcomb was thinking. He was thinking of a high hill, and of a certain small boy who had wanted to see what was on the other side of it. And he was thinking that always, all the way up, there had been a hill and the boy had wanted to see what was on the other side of it. And always he had found out.

It had been easy, fatally easy. And it had been so much more interesting than just staying dully in one place. To be sure, the last time, and the time before, it had not been quite so easy to find just the right "job." And certainly never before had he been down to his last five-dollar bill. More and more frequently of late, too, there had come to him an unaccountable, rather unpleasant feeling of loneliness. Stray glimpses through lamp-lit windows revealing firelight and red tablecloths had brought a disagreeable sensation of not "belonging"; and his old tingling sense of freedom, glorious freedom, had vanished, leaving an uncomfortable querying as to who, if anybody, would care when for the last time he found out what was on the other side of that hill. Of course there was the thirty thousand dollars—if he had not been quite such a wanderer there would probably now be——

With a vexed frown and a restless jerk of his body he brought himself back to the immediate and insistent present—to Tommy, and the cash now available. Just how long *would* three dollars and eighty cents last when one had on one's hands a small runaway boy who refused to run home? John Newcomb wondered. As to giving Tommy back to the

streets whence he came, John Newcomb never so much as thought of that.

. . . . . .

And thus, merrily, with a laugh and a jest, was the little Ball fashioned by the hands of the Fates.

CHAPTER II

The Ball Begins to Roll

IT was a little past noon, Saturday, when Dodge of *The Clarion* sauntered into the Common and dropped himself disconsolately upon a settee.

Plainly there was "nothing doing." Not once that day had there been so much as a fluttering handkerchief, or a wind-blown hat, to suggest a story. And in despair Dodge had about concluded that he must fall back on his emergency stock when his eyes chanced upon the face of a young man on the opposite settee.

It was a strong face, yet unmistakably that of one who feels himself down and out. With a grunt of satisfaction the newspaper man reached for his pencil and began to sketch on his pad the clean-cut features, close-cropped beard, and brooding eyes. He would capture the picture now, while the man was quiet, Dodge decided. After that, probably, he could get the fellow to talking.—It was not the first time that Dodge had found his "story" on a park bench.

Not until the sketch was nearly done did the unconscious model rouse himself; then with a sigh he turned, his eyes listlessly curious.

"Sketching?" he asked?

Dodge smiled and nodded his head.

"Yes," he answered as he dropped the pad in his

pocket, rose to his feet, and strolled over to the other settee. "Ever try it yourself?"

"Have I 'tried' it?" mocked the stranger a little bitterly. "Oh, yes, I've tried it, all right. In fact, I'll defy you to tackle me with anything I haven't tried—and failed in."

"That so?" Dodge was careful to bring his voice to just the pitch that a proper sympathetic interest required. Within himself he was rejoicing gleefully. He had noted the tinge of bitterness, the quick turn of the head, the eager welcoming of companionship; and he knew that he had stumbled upon a much-tried soul in an hour when it was ready to make the stones themselves listeners. The story—whether or not it would be worth while—would be forthcoming now; and Dodge contentedly settled himself to hear it. "That so?" he murmured again. "Well, well, you don't say!"

"But I do say," retorted the man irritably. "And I can prove it, too. Just try me and see."

"What?" Dodge stared. "Oh, I understand," he laughed then comprehendingly. "Well, how's—music? Ever tried that?"

For an answer the man drew a harmonica from his pocket and played a strain or two of "Dixie."

"Very good. Well—medicine? Now don't shove out a pill, please," begged Dodge, with a whimsically upraised hand.

The man smiled a little sadly and shook his head.

"I won't. And, really, I haven't done much at that—only on cats and dogs."

"Hm-m!—Law?"

"Read it one year."

"Trade—commerce?"

"Ran a periodical store in New York six months."

"War?—Ever fight?"

"Philippines."

"So! Hm-m; how about—civil engineering?"

"Worked at that in Australia."

"Farming?"

"Montana."

"Gorry! Well, you—you haven't exactly—er—stayed put, have you?" laughed the newspaper man.

The other shook his head gloomily.

"I suppose not. That's what's the matter, I suspect. I've been three times around the world, twice before the mast and once as mate. I've dug gold in California, and potatoes in Maine,—and I've made just about as much at one as the other. I've raised oranges in Florida, and wheat in Canada, and—I've got just one dollar and thirty-five cents in my pocket now."

Dodge laughed.

"You need a wife to help you settle down," he suggested.

"Perhaps I do. In fact—," the man paused and smiled oddly. "That's just what I need. And if I could have her—it would mean just thirty thousand dollars to me."

Dodge lifted his eyebrows.

"Thirty thousand dollars! Aren't you flying rather high—for a fellow with one dollar and thirty-five cents in his pocket?"

"But I'd have the thirty thousand—then."

"If she gave it to you;—yes, I suppose so."

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"You don't understand. The mere fact that if I had her—a wife—and had settled down—would mean that the money was mine—by inheritance."

The newspaper man sat suddenly erect.

"You mean—Great Scott, man! What *do* you mean?" he demanded.

Again that odd smile came to the other's face.

"It does sound nutty, doesn't it? Sometimes I think myself it can't be true. Still, I've known it so long, I should think I might get used to the idea, if I ever was going to. And perhaps, in a way, that's the trouble; I've known it so long that I *have* got used to it, and have only regarded it as something that was goin' to happen in the dim and distant future. Well, I waked up the other day to a realization that it was going to happen next year—and that I wasn't any nearer fulfilling the conditions than I was when they were made."

"The—conditions? You mean, for—the property?" Dodge spoke hesitatingly, and with quickened breath. Even now he could not quite believe the reality of this story-nugget that had so unexpectedly dropped into his hand.

"Yes. You see, to inherit this thirty thousand dollars I must be married and settled down by my thirtieth birthday; and that's just a year and one month from now. Well, do I look as if I were going to be married? I doubt if I know six girls by name, and I *know* I don't know one well enough to *call* her by name."

"Great Scott! Mr.—er—." Dodge paused suggestively.

"Newcomb. My name is John Newcomb."

"Newcomb—thank you. Well, Great Scott! Man, that's easy! As if you couldn't find plenty of girls who would be willing to marry thirty thousand dollars—and you."

"Perhaps. But—I'm not looking for that kind."

"What kind?"

"The kind that's looking for the thirty thousand dollars."

"Shucks! You mustn't be too particular. Besides, you might marry her, get the money, then—er—pay her off and lose her if—if you didn't like the looks of her around afterward," laughed the newspaper man.

"Thanks," returned Newcomb, dryly, "but I don't happen to be that kind."

"No, of course not," laughed Dodge hastily. "I was only joking, anyway."

"For that matter, I don't know a girl that I'd marry for—for a hundred thousand," declared John Newcomb, shortly.

"But you *can* know them, man,—dozens of them. Get busy!"

"With the money for bait? Not much! No, thank you. I can tell you right away now—and I mean it—that if the girl knew of that money and the conditions it would be enough for me. *I* wouldn't want *her*."

"Oh, come, now! That is carrying it too far—surely it is. But, tell me, why don't you know girls, lots of them?—Girls you would marry? I'm sure you must have seen enough of them—in all your globe-trotting."

"I wasn't that sort, ever, I guess. Or, perhaps, I've never seen the right kind. Maybe I've seen too much of them—in the lives of other fellows—to want to risk it for myself. The best friend I ever had was married for his money," finished John Newcomb, with an expressive shrug, relapsing then into moody silence.

For one minute, two minutes, the newspaper man

waited hopefully. Then, with carefully hidden eagerness he hazarded:

"You surely have had—some life of it, Mr. Newcomb."

"I have." John Newcomb spoke with a renewed vigor that sent a relieved relaxation to the tense muscles of the avid newspaper man. "At eight I was an orphan with my own way to make in the world. My uncle—the one who finally left me the thirty thousand—sent me to school and did what he could for me; but I was an uneasy little chap. Life to me meant anything and everything that was beyond the top of the highest hill I could see. So, as you can guess, I was always pulling at my leading strings—and one day I broke them. I ran away. I simply went—though I came back now and then, of course, to see my uncle. He didn't like my roving life, and said so very plainly, though he was always helping me out of tight places.

"Things haven't prospered with me. I'll own that. Twice it has been dishonest partners; once, fire; and once, earthquake—that was in San Francisco. Even the vessel I was mate on went down, and much as ever I didn't go with it. But I never minded it—any of it. In fact, I think I rather enjoyed it—it gave me a chance to climb the next hill and get something new, you know. And it's always been fairly easy—before. But now—" He stopped, with the usual expressive shrug of his shoulders. Then, after a minute, he went on speaking.

"Years ago, when I was a boy, my uncle told me that when I was married and settled down, with a wife, I should have thirty thousand dollars. Nine years ago he died and he had put his promise into

his will setting the time at my thirtieth birthday. Well, lately, I have waked up to the fact that I'm thirty next year, and—where's my wife?"

"I still contend that she's waiting for you," laughed Dodge, "and then will come the thirty thousand."

"Meanwhile, what am I to live on? I believe I mentioned that I had just one dollar and thirty-five cents. And, as it happens, I could use a little money very well just about now."

"Out of a job?"

"Yes. Been trying three weeks to get one," said Newcomb, rising to his feet with the abrupt irritation of a man who suddenly realizes that he has been talking—and talking a great deal.

"But, here, say—hold on," begged Dodge. "Where are you stopping? You see, I—I might know of a job for you," he hinted with sudden inspiration.

Wearily the other gave a street and number.

"I'm there now," he added, "but I won't be long—unless that job turns up mighty soon. I've got an appointment to-day with a man at four o'clock, and maybe that— But, what's the use? I've thought the same thing dozens of times and—here I am."

"Brace up! Better luck coming," encouraged Dodge as he turned away. Then, as if casually, he called over his shoulder: "Oh, I say, old chap. I write a little, you see. You wouldn't mind my using this little yarn of yours for—for copy, would you?"

"Of course not. If there's anything in it for you, go ahead. I'm sure there's mighty little in it for me, all right—but it ought to be of some good to some one!"

"Thanks!" breathed the newspaper man fervently,

as he turned away and hurried down the shaded path.

. . . . . .

And It was off—that Ball—with a skip and a bounce; and the Fates laughed to see it go.

CHAPTER III

And Merrily, Merrily Rolled the Ball

IT was almost six o'clock that Saturday night when John Newcomb dashed up the three flights of stairs and flung open the door of his tiny back bedroom.

"Oh, I say Tommy, the world isn't so bad after all," he crowed, "the job has come!—Well, why don't you laugh, dance, say something?" he demanded, as the small boy at the window still sat disconsolately looking out at the net-work of clotheslines below him.

"*I* didn't find any job to-day," emphasized Tommy aggrievedly, after a moment.

"But *I* did."

"Well, that ain't *me*."

Newcomb laughed.

"Tommy, I suspect you should say 'That isn't I,'" he retorted playfully. "You'll find, when you go to school, that— Why, Tommy, what is the matter?" he broke off in amazement.

Tommy had sprung from his seat, and was standing facing him. The boy was fairly trembling with rage.

"Be *you* a-goin' ter say such things as that to me, too? Be *you* a-goin' ter keep tellin' me that I'd oughter do everythin' different from what I am doin' it? Be yer?"

"Why, Tommy!" exclaimed the man again, in stupefaction.

"Because if ye be, I ain't a-goin' ter stay with yer," the boy stumbled on breathlessly. "That's why I left—" He stopped short, his face red with suppressed fury. "Well, anyhow, I—I jes' ain't going ter stand it," he finished with sullen defiance.

Distressed and surprised as John Newcomb was, he yet understood very well that now was not the time to remonstrate with the boy, or to try to find out what was the matter. Lightly, therefore, he said:

"All right, suppose we let the grammar go for awhile and trot downstairs to dinner. I'm hungry as a bear, Tommy. I may be eating you yet. Come on," he finished gayly leading the way from the room.

The boy, still flushed-faced and angry-eyed, followed slowly—but he followed, which was all John Newcomb wanted just then.

Dinner was not an entire success that night in spite of John Newcomb's very evident good spirits. Tommy, still looking not at all like himself, ate sparingly of the watery soup, and nibbled listlessly at the tough roast beef and cold mashed potato. But by the time the cake and stewed prunes came on to the table, the pretty stenographer across the table had him laughing heartily at one of her jokes, though his face was still rather sober as he followed John Newcomb up the stairs a little later.

In their own room John Newcomb took out his pipe and began to fill it. Thoughtfully for a moment Tommy watched him, then he spoke:

"If I had a cigarette I could smoke, too, couldn't I? I suppose ye hain't—got one?" His eyes and

the intonation of his voice made this last remark a question.

The man turned sharply. His pipe halfway to his mouth.

"A cigarette—*you!* Why, Tommy, you can't—" Just in time John Newcomb caught himself. "Er—no, Tommy," he amended lamely, "I—haven't any cigarettes." He put the pipe in his mouth and struck a match.

Tommy still watched him thoughtfully.

"I never tried a pipe," he observed then, "but I don't know but I could. Maybe you *have* got another pipe."

John Newcomb's match went out.

"A p-pipe, Tommy?"

"Yes, sir. I'd be glad ter try it. You know a smoke *does* help a man when he didn't get—his job."

John Newcomb took out his pipe and coughed; he not only coughed, he choked. He hesitated, threw a quick glance into Tommy's face, then put his pipe away altogether.

"Yes, I know, Tommy," he said steadily, but cheerfully. "As it happens, though, I haven't another pipe. But, anyhow, it's too warm in here. Suppose we go out for a walk. Down to the Public Garden, maybe. Come on."

And Tommy went, though there was still a wistful frown on his face.

"Not that I'm going to give up smoking—for *him*, of course," mused John Newcomb a bit irritably, as he strode along at Tommy's side. "But, a *pipe*—that boy—good Lord!"

Under the trees in the Public Garden, in the soft evening air, with the lights, the laughter, the pretty swan-boats, and the rippling water to cast their

magic, Tommy forgot for awhile to frown. After a time, however, he went back to his grievance.

"I don't see *why* I didn't get a job," he sighed.

"Tommy, how old did you say you were?" asked the man pleasantly.

"Twelve, goin' on thirteen."

"Well, now, of course you want a first-rate job, I suppose, eh?"

"Sure, I do!"

"None of your little two-for-a-cent kind?"

"Yer bet I don't! I'm goin' ter make my fortune, Mr. John, ye know. *I'm* goin' to be a big man some day!"

"Of course you are," agreed John Newcomb promptly. "Going to know a lot, too, aren't you?"

"Sure, I am!"

"Well, then, Tommy, don't you think you'd better begin pretty soon to know a little of that lot?"

"Huh?" Tommy frowned slightly.

"I say, don't you think it's about time you began to learn something now?"

Tommy turned sharply. His eyes were fiercely suspicious.

"Do you mean—school?" he demanded.

"That's what I mean," rejoined the man lightly. John Newcomb, remembering the boy's outbreak an hour or two before, was not really so confident as his words indicated. But he held his ground bravely.

"Humph!" sniffed Tommy, turning his eyes back to the fascinating little boats on the pond. "I don't think much of schools."

"No, I didn't, either, Tommy,—once, and that's what's the matter now, I suppose," sighed the man.

There was a long silence. The boy stirred rest-

lessly, and sent a furtive glance into the man's brooding face. After a while he spoke.

"Why, Mr. John, what do ye mean?"

"Eh? What? Oh, nothing, Tommy, only—well, I was going to be a big man once, too, you see, and—I haven't made good; that's all."

Again the boy stirred restlessly.

"I suppose ye mean—school!" he almost snapped.

The man smiled.

"That's just what I mean, Tommy." He paused, then went on. A deeper note in his voice. "You see, that's why I don't want you to make the mistake I did, Tommy. If I'd buckled down to school and studies, and let the other side of that big hill go for a while, I wouldn't have been just where I am now. As it is, I've been nothing but a rolling stone, and—I like to roll, now, Tommy. I can't seem to do anything but roll. No sooner do I get nicely settled then the least little rap of adversity or non-success sets me rolling again, and I roll and roll until some little pebble of circumstance stops me, and—I begin all over again."

The man paused and sighed. Tommy, wide-eyed, was listening intently. It was a strange story, and a fascinating one, though he was not quite sure he understood it—all. *Did* Mr. John really roll, say, as a boy would roll downhill?

"This time," resumed the man, after a moment, "this time, Tommy, the new job didn't come quite so soon. I actually began to get scared for fear it wasn't coming at all."

"That's when ye was a feedin' the squirrels an'—met me?"

"Yes, my boy. That's why I hated to see you

start in to follow in my footsteps. That's why I want to stop you now, if I can."

"But don't ye know—a lot?"

The man shook his head.

"Oh, I know some things, Tommy. I went back to school afterward, and even to college, some. I've picked up a lot in my travels, too, in a way, a smattering of this and that. But, you see, even then, I just rolled along, just as I always had. It isn't a bit as it would have been if I'd buckled right down and tended to business in the first place as I should have done. I see it all very clearly now; and so I—I put out my foot the other night and tried to stop *your* rolling in the very beginning," he finished whimsically.

The boy gave an uncertain smile.

"Yer mean—when ye took me ter eat beans that day?"

"Yes."

For a moment the boy considered this without speaking; then he squared his young shoulders and said:

"Well, Mr. John, I ain't kickin' at yer stoppin' me, an' I'm much obliged for the beans, an' everything since, of course; but ye needn't think ye can make me roll back where I came from, 'cause I ain't goin' ter."

The man smiled, but he frowned, too.

"Well, Tommy, I'm sorry. I hoped I could get you to do that; but—well, suppose we make another side to that bargain; if I won't say anything more about your going back where you came from, will you stay and live with me and go to school?"

"I'd rather have a job."

"You'll find school is a job all right, Tommy."

"But I want one that will make me a big man."

"You couldn't get a better one for that purpose, either, Tommy. Is it a bargain?"

"W-well, Mr. John, I'll live with ye, an' be glad ter; but say we don't put in the school part. Ye see, honest Injun, I want ter be lookin' for a job—a real job, with money in it."

"Very well, then," nodded the man, getting to his feet briskly, "of course you understand the bargain is off, and I shall still be hunting for some way to find out where you came from, and to send you back to them."

The boy's face under the electric light showed suddenly white. Then it flushed red. A look very near to terror leaped to the wide appealing eyes.

"Mr. John, I—I guess we'll say it's a bargain," chattered Tommy. "I'll stay an'—go to school. Honest Injun, I will!"

"Good!" cried the man. Then he added quizzically: "After all, Tommy, I wonder if you aren't getting the best of the bargain. You see, it's only June now, and school won't begin till next September."

"Whew! Ain't that the luck now," Tommy grinned appreciatively. "What'll I be doin' till then?"

"I don't know," acknowledged John Newcomb with a smile. "But you'll be doing something, I'll warrant. But, anyhow, *I've* got a job, so our bread-and-butter'll be sure, and a place to sleep."

"Maybe I can get a job, too—jes' till September, of course," added Tommy with a sidelong glance.

"Well, we'll see about that," laughed the man. "In the meanwhile you'll live with me. And sup-

pose you call me 'Uncle John.' How'll that suit you?"

"Bang up! I like that."

"Very good! Then suppose we be going home now. It's getting late."

"This is Saturday, ain't it?" asked Tommy, as they walked along the shaded path together.

"I believe it is."

"An' to-morrow's Sunday. Well—" The boy hesitated and gave his trousers an awkward hitch. "Mr.—I mean, Uncle John, you ain't much on—church, be ye?"

John Newcomb laughed.

"Church? I'm afraid not, Tommy. Church and I have had very little to do with each other the past dozen years. Why?"

"Nothin'. I was thinkin', that's all. I hain't no use for 'em, either,—church, an' God, an' Sunday schools."

With a sharp exclamation under his breath, John Newcomb almost—but not quite—came to a stop. Then with a frown and an irritable shrug of his shoulders he went on down the path toward Beacon Street. His face expressed annoyance, dismay, and bewilderment. Now and then he threw a hurried, irresolute glance toward the boy at his side. They had almost reached the shabby-genteel boarding-house when he drew a long breath and said, as if casually in passing:

"I'm thinking, though, Tommy, that I may be going to church to-morrow. We'll see in the morning." Then he began to talk at once about a huge electric sign that was flashing its message from away across the Common.

In his own room, afterward, John Newcomb

irritably asked himself why he had made such an assertion, and as irritably told himself that he should not carry it out anyway. Yet even as he made the irate declaration to himself he knew that Sunday morning would find him and Tommy brushed and sponged and stiffly erect in some church pew.

When Tommy had gone to bed and was fast asleep, John Newcomb still sat thinking. With his eyes on the face of the sleeping boy he wondered what could have driven the youth from home, and where that home was. He wondered, too, if he himself were right in agreeing for the present not to urge the boy to go back. Later, of course, after he had won the boy's love and confidence, he might try again; but now— There really seemed, anyway, nothing else that he could do now, in the face of the boy's wilfulness, and in the face, too, of the look of almost terror that always came to the boy's eyes when that home was mentioned. What a home it must have been to bring a look like that to Tommy's face!

Home!—The red tablecloth, the shaded light, the open fire. Was it a home like that from which Tommy had fled? Of course there were homes— If only he himself had a home now, a real home, to offer Tommy!

With a sigh, John Newcomb wondered: if he had not been so eager in the long ago to see the other side of that hill, would he now have a home himself; and would there be in it, perhaps, a little woman with kind eyes and a cheery smile to comfort and admonish Tommy as he should be comforted and admonished?

A wife! At the thought he remembered suddenly

the man he had talked with that day in the Common. He remembered, too, what the man had said; and all by himself in his shabby-genteel boarding-house room, he gave a little disdainful smile. As if he, John Newcomb, would marry a girl he did not love just to win a few—or many, for that matter—thousands of dollars! As if a home, a real home, could ever be built on a foundation like that! Of course if he knew a girl, and loved her— But he didn't!

And with a shrug John Newcomb rose to his feet and began to prepare for bed.

. . . . . .

And the Fates? The Fates chuckled softly, and gave the Ball a gentle, gentle push.

CHAPTER IV

Faster and Faster Down the Hill

ON Monday morning after an early breakfast John Newcomb began his first day's work in the office of Grow & Son. Tommy, too, in a way began work that same Monday morning. Tommy's "job" had come. To be sure at present it consisted only of a few hours of errand-running and other light work for Mrs. Snow, the landlady. The afternoon, John Newcomb insisted, must be spent by Tommy out of doors at play in the City Playground not far from the house.

John Newcomb was late home that night, and all the other boarders had left the dining-room when he and Tommy sat down to dinner. He did not notice the curious glances of the table-girl, though he was a little surprised that Mrs. Snow came in twice to ask if there was anything that he needed. Mrs. Snow was not usually so concerned for his welfare.

Tuesday morning he left early again before most of the boarders had come down to breakfast; but on Tuesday night he came home before six o'clock; and it was on Tuesday night that he found waiting for him in his room four letters.

"Why, what can all this be?" he murmured, as he broke the seal of a pale blue, scented envelope.

"Dear Mr. Newcomb," ran the letter, "I am in just the position you are, only I can't get *mine* for

two years. I should love to meet you, and I am sure we could help each other. Won't you call? I am nineteen years old, and considered very pretty, but I'll let you judge that part for yourself."

Then followed a name and address.

"Why, what—?" cried the puzzled man again, as he thrust his thumb under the flap of the second envelope.

This letter was not pale blue, nor scented. It was plain white, straightforward, and business-like.

"Dear Sir: I think perhaps I can help you out of your predicament. I have a daughter, twenty-two years old, smart, capable, and affectionate. If you say the word I will arrange it so you can meet her. But I want you to understand that my daughter isn't the kind of a girl to write to unknown men and propose marriage. No, sir-ee! I'm willing to meet you, to look up your references, and—if I find everything straight—to help you along with Minnie. (My daughter's name is Minnie Isabella.)

"Awaiting your reply, I am

"Most truly your well-wisher,

"JANE HARROW."

"What in thunder does this mean!" ejaculated Newcomb, picking up with excited fingers the third envelope.

From this dropped a photograph, the pictured face of a young girl with pretty eyes and a weak mouth. On a piece of note-paper were scribbled these words:

"This is a picture of your wife, if you are sensible. I shall walk in the Common, Wednesday night be-

tween seven and half-past, Tremont Street Mall. By-by till then."

There was no name signed.

Too thoroughly dazed for words now, Newcomb picked up the fourth letter, and here he found the first clew to the solution of his puzzle.

"Dear Sir:" ran the letter. "When I read the account of your life in *The Clarion* Monday morning, I said, 'Deborah, there's your chance!' And so that's why I'm writing to you now.

"I'm no lovesick, sentimental schoolgirl. I am forty years old. I have got three thousand dollars and a nice little paying business—a small dry-goods store. Now I figure it this way. You want the money, and a job, and you've *got* to have a wife (to get the money). Well, I'll be the wife and give you a job right away, tending store,—and in return all I ask is one half the thirty thousand dollars when it comes. Beyond that I won't need you, and you won't need me. The day the money is paid over, you are welcome to take your half and skip to parts unknown, if you like, and no questions asked. How's that for a bargain? You may call next Wednesday night, if you please, and discuss particulars.

"Maybe you think I'm talking pretty sure—and I am sure. I studied your face in the paper a good deal, before I wrote, and I called it a mighty sensible one, else I wouldn't have written at all.

"Yours for business,
"Deborah Jameson."

Plain as this epistle was, only a few of the words stood out clearly before John Newcomb's eyes: "When I read the account of your life in *The Clarion* Monday morning," and "I studied your face in the

paper." With an angry word he jammed his hat on to his head and hurried out to the street.

Not immediately did he find a Monday's *Clarion*, but when he did find one the rest of the search was short indeed.

Across half the front page the headlines sprawled:

MARRY HE MUST BY JULY NEXT YEAR
WANTED——A WIFE
GOING————$30,000

Below came the story, and it was told with all the snap and color of Dodge at his best. The sketch was there, too,—the settee, the dejected figure of the man, the fine-lined, brooding face with its closely-cropped, pointed beard. Not until he saw the sketch, indeed, did John Newcomb quite understand. Then, with a wrathful ejaculation he thrust the paper under his arm and went back to his room.

There he found Tommy.

Tommy was plainly excited. His eyes fell at once to the paper in John Newcomb's hand.

"Is that it—the paper?" he asked eagerly.

"What paper?" John Newcomb's heart sank, though still he hoped against hope.

"The one with yer picture an' all the rest in it."

With a chagrined exclamation John Newcomb tossed his hat on the bed and dropped himself into a chair. He still maintained a firm grasp on the paper.

"What do you know about that, Tommy?"

"Nothin', much. I read some, but they wouldn't let me see it but a minute."

"*They?*"

"Mr. Bland an' Miss Stetson, an' the woman with them black dinglers in her ears."

John Newcomb gave a groan.

"So they've seen it, have they?"

"Oh, yes, sir—this mornin' in the hall, after you'd gone. I saw them. An' they was *so* interested! An' Mis' Snow, too. They all was interested."

"I don't doubt it," observed the man grimly.

"They knew it last night, some of 'em; an' Mis' Snow, she was goin' ter speak to ye about it. But she didn't like to. Then this mornin' Mr. Bland brought down the paper ter show Miss Stetson an' the rest. An' I saw it—a minute. They wouldn't let me see it long. An', say, Uncle John, is it true? Honest Injun, have ye got ter get married ter get the money?"

From the hall below at that moment sounded the clang of the dinner gong.

With a sigh and a shrug John Newcomb got to his feet.

"Never mind about that now, Tommy. Let's forget it—if we can. Heaven knows I've had enough of it. I'll probably get more at the dinner table, as it is. But we'll go down. There's no getting away from it now, of course. I suppose we might as well face it first as last."

So they went down. And, as John Newcomb said, there was no getting away from it.

It showed itself first in the dead silence that fell abruptly on the room as John Newcomb and Tommy entered the door, and in covert glances and frank stares from several pairs of eyes as they sat down. A moment later somebody remarked what a nice day it was, whereupon somebody else tittered hysterically —and that very moment the rain could be heard

beating against the window-pane! Several began to talk of nothing in particular all at once; then a bolder spirit than the rest called a gay challenge from the foot of the table and asked John Newcomb how soon they might expect to receive the wedding cards.

It was easy then. Everybody laughed, and the quips and jokes came from all sides. The pretty stenographer across the table said she would address the envelopes for him, but the bookkeeper objected strenuously to this, and said no, that he would do it, that they should be pen-written, not typewritten. Mrs. Snow said she hoped he *would* find a good wife, she was sure; and Mr. Bland mischievously hinted that he needn't look further than that table if he really wanted a nice little wife. Whereupon the stenographer blushed and tittered, and Miss Stetson cried, "Oh, Mr. Bland!" and the widow at the other end of the table who was forty at least, and not at all pretty, shook her jet earrings and exclaimed coyly: "Fie, fie, for shame!"

And John Newcomb laughed and kept his temper, and answered jest for jest. But he didn't eat much dinner; and as soon as he could he went upstairs with Tommy and searched through all the papers for advertisements reading: "Boarders Wanted."

At eight o'clock Dodge called.

"I thought I'd come," he announced cheerfully, "to see how you were getting along."

John Newcomb, recognizing his caller's face, sent Tommy downstairs on an errand.

Dodge was surprised then—or pretended to be—to meet the angry flash of John Newcomb's eyes, and to hear the indignant words that John Newcomb did not hesitate to hurl at him.

"But—why, man alive, you *told* me I might use it," argued Dodge soothingly. "Besides, it can't hurt you, really,—and it made a bully story!"

"Did it! Humph! Oh, I know I told you you might use it," admitted Newcomb vexedly; "the more fool I! But who supposed you were a newspaper man, and would set it out like that—name and all?"

"Come, come! Don't take it so seriously. 'Twas only a joke—and it may do you good."

"Good? Do me good? I should like to know if you call that sort of thing doing 'good' to me!" And Newcomb spread before his visitor's eager eyes the four letters he had received that evening.

"Whew!" whistled Dodge gleefully. "I thought you would hear from that. Say, but this is rich!"

John Newcomb saw his mistake at once, and with two sprawling hands he hid the letters from sight.

"No, you don't," he cried. "You don't set eyes on one of them—unless you give me your word of honor that no one else shall see them, or copy them."

"Oh, come! You wouldn't spoil it *now!*"

"But I would."

"But it's just begun. This is where the fun comes in."

"Not for me!"

"Come, come! You don't mean, really, that you won't let me use the letters? Why, *they* can't hurt you. *You* didn't write them."

"I didn't—thank goodness!"

"Then, where's the harm?"

"The harm was yesterday—or, rather, before then,—in my ever telling you the story," declared Newcomb, sharply. "Do you suppose I want such letters as these coming to me?" he demanded. "If

you do, you've made a mistake in your man,—that's all. A rolling stone, a ne'er-do-well, if you like; but I'm not—*that*," he finished, sweeping the hated letters into his hands and flinging them on to the bed.

Tommy came into the room then, and Dodge went away after making peace as best he could with his irate "copy."

There were no more stories in *The Clarion* concerning John Newcomb and his inheritance, during the days that followed; but other newspapers had copied the story, and John's name and history had traveled far. The letters still came from city, town, village, and farmhouse; and with them came photographs, locks of hair, flowers, and even crocheted ties and embroidered hat-bands. He had changed his boarding-place at once, so he escaped unpleasant callers; but his mail was forwarded. He shaved off the tell-tale beard, and in every way sought to avoid recognition.

Alone, in his room, John Newcomb sometimes blushed for the women who so recklessly laid their hearts and hands at the feet of himself—a stranger. The gifts he returned, but not one letter did he answer. Very scornfully he asked himself what could tempt him even to glance at one of his uninvited, unwelcome correspondents. To only one of all the photographs did he give a second look, and that was to the picture of a dainty little girl, perhaps five years old, in curls and white muslin, which came one gloomy, rainy day. There was no letter. But on the back of the photograph were these words:

"This is the way I used to look. If you want to see how I look now come to the Art Museum next

Saturday afternoon and watch for a girl in white with a pink rose."

"Now, I'd like to see *her*," mused the man with a smile, looking at the childish face admiringly. John Newcomb was very fond of children, and it seemed, for the moment, as if it were the five-year-old little girl who had said that she would be at the Art Museum next Saturday afternoon. "But, then, of course I wouldn't really—*go*," he added decisively, as he read the words again on the back of the photograph. (John Newcomb had quite forgotten that he had already promised to take Tommy to the Museum that very same Saturday afternoon.) "No, of course I wouldn't really go," he repeated. Then, obeying a sudden impulse, he propped the picture up on the mantelpiece, and stood off and looked at it.

He had forgotten all about it when Tommy that evening just before going to bed, spied the picture and asked a prompt question.

"Who's that?" he demanded.

"That? Oh, that's Curlylocks," laughed John Newcomb, with his characteristic shrug. "I don't know her other name. I put her up there because of her smile and to make us feel homey."

And again in John Newcomb's eyes and thoughts was the vision only of a five-year-old little child.

. . . . . .

And the Fates smiled again, and said among themselves, "Ah, ha!"

CHAPTER V

The Ball Leaps the Fence to Pastures New

THE Bennetts' home was the lower suite of a two-apartment house in Dorchester. There were four in the family: Mrs. Bennett, frail, crippled with rheumatism, yet courageous and smiling; Kate Bennett, twenty-five, dainty, dark-eyed but fair-haired and fair-skinned,—the bread-winner; Helen, twenty-two, strong, practical, wholesome,—the bread-baker; and Harold, seventeen, handsome, light-hearted, a little headstrong, and more than a little selfish,—the bread-eater he might almost be said to be, for after all, aside from the little mother, it was chiefly for him that the bread was earned and baked. And it was around him, as on a pivot, that the lives of the three women revolved.

Mrs. Bennett spent her days in her room in the wheel-chair, or in bed. Kate spent hers in an exclusive Boston milliner's establishment, fashioning hats that were marvels of beauty. Aside from Mrs. Bennett's not too large annuity no money came into the house except what the building of those hats brought. Harold, had you asked him, would have said that he was spending his time in "just living, and having a good time."

On this particular Friday in June there was a visitor in the Bennett home, a cousin, Mrs. Polly

Wheelock; and the Bennetts were specially desirous that the wistful-eyed little woman should have the pleasantest visit possible.

"Of course we can't do much that costs," sighed Mrs. Bennett to her daughters that evening after their visitor had gone to bed, "but there are the shops, and the gay streets, and the Public Library, and the Art Museum. You know that those are the things she *says* she wants."

"And she shall have them," declared Helen cheerily. "I'll get the dinner and entertain her to-morrow morning until Kate comes home for her Saturday half-holiday. That will leave the Library and Museum for the afternoon."

"And *you'll* take her to those while I play Bridget," announced Kate emphatically.

"I? Nonsense, Kate! It'll have to be you. Don't you see? Cousin Polly will want every last red robe and sceptre in those Library pictures of the Holy Grail explained to her, to say nothing of the Museum things. You'll simply have to do it."

Kate laughed, but she sighed, too, as she rose to her feet.

"All right," she said, "I'll go, only—" She did not finish her sentence; but later, at the door of her own room, she turned troubled eyes on her sister.

"Helen, what shall I wear?"

"Why, I don't know; your suit, as usual, I suppose, though maybe it is a little warm for that."

"It is—but I'd not hesitate on that account. I can't wear it, though, for I ripped the braid off coming home to-night, and the silk on the collar is worn through. I stopped at Miss Jameson's around the corner and got some silk that's a splendid match for it. I was going to fix it this evening, but I found

Polly here, and—well, you know the rest. I simply haven't anything else, though."

Helen frowned.

"Yes, I know," she sighed. There was a moment's silence, then her face cleared.

"What's the matter with wearing a shirt waist and your white linen skirt? You could wear that."

"Y-yes," conceded Kate, with a thoughtful frown, "only there's my hat. My suit hat isn't fresh, and it would look worse with that white."

"Where's your white hat?"

"In the box, waiting for some flowers to get cheap enough so I can buy them," she answered. "I could bend the hat so it would do, even though it is old; but the flowers are hopeless."

"Oh, Kate, Kate! And when you make such beautiful hats," sighed Helen.

"Yes, but '*my*' hats cost money. I can't afford to trade—at '*my*' shop," retorted Kate, with a whimsical lift of her eyebrows.

"If only—" Helen paused, then turned hurriedly. "Kate, come here into my room, but get your hat first. I've got a scheme."

"Of course you've got a scheme," laughed Kate, as she started to get her hat. "I never knew you when you didn't have one—if it was to help somebody else out of a scrape." A moment later she stood in dismayed remonstrance before her sister. "No, no. Not that! Why, Helen, you've spoiled it!"

Helen laughed her disdain. In one hand she held a beautiful pink rose with its leaves; in the other the scissors with which she had snipped it from the now dismantled hat on the bed.

"Spoiled? Not a bit of it—not when I have Madame Tourgee's head trimmer right in the house

to put it on again for me—when I want it. Come, now, quick!" she urged, in answer to Kate's continued remonstrance. "Run along and put it on." And reluctantly, but gratefully, Kate turned and carried the rose away to her room.

It was after Kate had gone to her work the next morning (in a suit with a mended braid and a worn collar) that Helen and her mother had their first opportunity for a "real good visit," as Mrs. Bennett termed it, with their guest. And it was not long before both Mrs. Bennett and Helen saw that something was seriously troubling the little woman.

"My dear, what *is* the matter?" asked Mrs. Bennett at last. "You look thin and pale, and actually worried. If this is what comes of your marrying Seth Wheelock I am sorry I ever gave my consent to the match," she finished playfully.

To Mrs. Bennett's surprise and dismay Polly Wheelock covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

"Why, Polly!" cried Mrs. Bennett, "I—I did not mean to make you do—that! What *have* I said?"

The little woman opposite tried to stanch with her handkerchief the flood of tears.

"It—it's all right. I'm glad you did it," she stammered. "I've been wanting to tell you and the girls all about it, only I—I didn't know how to begin. And now—I can."

"Of course you can, dear, if it will do you any good, and if you *want* us to know."

"It will. I do," choked Polly Wheelock, with a long sigh. "Perhaps you can help me."

"I wish we could," said Helen sympathetically.

With a visible effort Mrs. Wheelock calmed herself enough to talk coherently.

"First I want you to know it isn't Seth," she began, "he's kindness itself to me, and—and I don't see how he can be, considering what's happened."

"Why, Polly! exclaimed Helen indignantly. "As if *you* could do anything to make any man unkind to you!"

Polly shook her head.

"I have," she choked. "That is, I didn't do it myself, but it's because of me that—that it was done."

"What was done?"

"Tommy ran away."

"Ran away—Tommy? And because of you!" ejaculated Mrs. Bennett.

"Nonsense, dear! I'm sure you must be mistaken," cried Helen.

Again the little woman opposite shook her head.

"I'm not. He left a note, and he said—'twas," she sighed.

"But—*why?*"

"That's the part I'm so afraid about," bemoaned Polly. "I'm not sure whether I did right or wrong. You see, I never saw Tommy at all until I married Mr. Wheelock and went there as his wife last December. All Mr. Wheelock had ever said was that he had a son about twelve years old, and—I'd been planning on what a good, good mother I'd be to the poor little fellow."

"And I know you *were* a good mother to him," declared Mrs. Bennett with emphasis, from her wheelchair by the window.

"But, let me tell you," cried Mrs. Wheelock despairingly. "It seems that people had told Tommy about me—that is, they had filled his poor little ears full of horrid tales about stepmothers, and

how cruel they were; and so he quite hated me, I think, before he ever saw me."

"But when he did see you—" suggested Helen.

"It didn't make any difference," sighed the little woman. "I tried, oh, I did try so hard to win him. But I—I couldn't. I learned afterward that he'd worshiped his mother, and that—with the stories and all that had been told him—he was very angry with his father for marrying again."

"What a shame that people should fill a child's head with wrong ideas!" exclaimed Helen.

"Yes," said the stepmother plaintively. "And what made it all the more difficult was the fact that for three years, ever since his mother died, he had run practically wild. Nobody could seem to do a thing with him. His father never understood him, I guess; and you know Mr. Wheelock *is* reserved and almost stern in his ways, and always was very much absorbed in his business. It was always Tommy and his mother, and after she went there didn't seem to be anybody that could do a thing with him. He just wouldn't go to school regularly, and he cared nothing for books. He played always with the roughest little boys, and he was delighted if he could find a tramp or a pedlar to talk to. He always used to declare he'd run off with one of them some day; but—we didn't think he ever *would*."

"Just the same, I don't see how he could help loving *you*," maintained Helen stoutly.

Mrs. Wheelock drew a long sigh and shook her head slowly.

"That's where my part came in, I suppose. You see, I—I was so anxious to be a good mother, and to do him good, that I—I'm afraid I corrected him most of the time. Oh, I did it kindly, always kindly;

but I did it. Of course I had to be firm, for you see he hadn't any manners, and his language was so coarse and ungrammatical! Of course while I was doing it, I supposed it was the only thing I could do—if I was going to be a good mother to him—but since he ran away I've been thinking, and I'm afraid he never *was* with me long but what I was saying 'You mustn't,' or 'You must,' to him. And, of course, after three years of freedom he didn't take to it kindly."

"I see," nodded Mrs. Bennett, thoughtfully. "Yet I'm sure you believed you were doing all right, Polly."

"When did he go?" asked Helen.

"Four weeks ago; the latter part of May. He left a note. Poor little fellow! It made my heart ache to read it. It showed—such a lot of things. And I'm afraid I *haven't* understood him."

"What did he say?"

"Oh, just that he was going away, and was never coming back. He was going where he wouldn't have to be told all the time to do and say everything different from the way he was doing and saying it. And he was going to be a big man some day. He said nobody wanted him, anyway; not even his father, for *he'd* got *me*. He told us not to look for him, and that he wasn't going to use his last name any more because *I* had it. He was going to be just Tommy. Oh, it was a dreadful note," broke off the little stepmother sobbingly. "I shan't ever, ever get over that note!"

"You poor dear," sympathized Mrs. Bennett. "But don't grieve so! You'll find him, I'm sure, some day. And then you can show him that you do love him, and everything will be all right."

Mrs. Wheelock shook her head.

"We have hunted everywhere, and inquired and advertised. We looked especially in Homes, and Orphan Asylums, and Police Courts, for of course that child cannot take care of himself. But we've never heard a thing."

"But you will some day, I'm sure you will," comforted Helen, as she rose to see about dinner.

Dinner was followed—for Kate and Mrs. Wheelock—by an early start for the Library and Art Museum; for Helen it was followed by a swift clearing away of the food and by a beginning of the dish-washing. This last was scarcely commenced, however, when Cora Dean from the apartment above appeared unceremoniously in the kitchen doorway.

Cora Dean was eighteen, petite, dark-haired, and merry-eyed. She looked particularly pretty to-day in her thin black dress, and her big hat with its nodding plumes. In her belt was a yellow rose. Her hands were bare. She carried her gloves and a large gingham apron.

"I've come to help," she announced cheerfully. "Then I want you to go out with me."

"Thanks, but I can't. Kate is gone."

"I know. I saw her," nodded the girl, "but mother's coming right down to sit with Mrs. Bennett. So you can go then, and I want you specially. I want you to go to the Art Museum with me," she finished, picking up a towel and attacking with capable hands the dishes in the drying rack.

"The Museum? Why, how odd! Whenever did *you* want to go to the Museum before?" laughed Helen. "Besides, that's exactly where Kate has gone with Mrs. Wheelock."

"The Museum!" Cora caught the edge of the

shelf as if for support. Her eyes widened and her face grew suddenly white.

"Helen, you don't mean— Kate Bennett hasn't gone to the Museum—*to-day!*"

"Why, yes, she has. There, and to the Library. Why not?"

"But she had on white, and—and a pink rose! I know she did—I saw her," gasped Cora, in a shaking voice.

The elder girl stared blankly.

"Well, what of it? Can't she wear white and a pink rose, if she wants to? Why, Cora, how funny you act! What's the matter with you?"

Cora dropped her towel, jerked off her apron, and caught up her gloves.

"Come, we must get her out! We must catch her—quick—before she gets there," implored the girl hysterically. "Come, come. Oh! do hurry! You would if you only knew!"

"Cora Dean! What in the world are you talking about?" demanded Helen, a little sharply. "We can't catch her. I don't know which she was going to first, though I think it was the Library. But why should we catch her? What do you mean?"

With an oddly resigned lifting of her head Cora Dean began her explanation. She spoke rapidly, yet with the calmness of desperation.

"I will tell you. I've got to tell you. But it was just a silly joke,—do remember that; and I hadn't the remotest idea that anything could come of it, else I wouldn't have done it. You know I wouldn't. Three weeks ago I saw in a newspaper a little story of a man who must get married in a year to get his fortune. After that I got to talking to that funny Miss Jameson who keeps the little store around the

corner, you know, and she owned up to having written him. She even showed me a copy of the letter; and, oh, Helen, if you could have seen it! I thought how I'd like to see his face when he read it, and the more I thought of it, the more I wanted to see him, just to see what he looked like, you know. And then was when I did the crazy thing? I made up my mind I *would* see him. I sent him a photograph—that little one of Kate's when she was six."

"Kate? *Our* Kate?" gasped Helen.

"Yes, yes—the little one I begged long ago, because it was so sweet;—you had two, anyway."

"But how dared you send it like that to a strange man—her picture!"

"I know,—'twas dreadful of me. But I chanced upon it, and 'twas a child's picture (of course I wouldn't have sent him a grown person's!) and I never thought of its doing any harm. On the back I scribbled: 'This is the way I used to look. If you want to know how I look now, come to the Art Museum next Saturday afternoon and watch for a girl in white with a pink rose.' "

"Oh, Cora! How could you!"

"I know; 'twas a crazy thing to do, of course. But it was such a lark, and I couldn't resist. I did so want to see what he looked like. And that's what I came for you to-day for. Don't you see? To go there with me—to the Museum."

"As if I would!" exclaimed Helen indignantly. Then she broke off: "But *you* aren't in white, with a pink rose!"

Miss Dean drew her diminutive self to its full height.

"I? Of course not! Helen Bennett, do you think for an instant I'd *speak* to the creature? I only

wanted to *see* him. But now—*Kate* has gone, and *in white* with a pink rose," she wailed shudderingly. "Helen, Helen! What shall we do—quick? You always get folks out of scrapes—Kate says you do. And you must get me out of this one."

Helen gave a gesture of doubt. She had gone back to her dishes, and was working feverishly. Helen had long ago learned that she had no time to stop work to do her thinking.

"But why did you say 'white with a pink rose' at all?" she demanded, not because the question could do any good but because she had to say something to give vent to her nervousness.

"For no reason—nothing. It was the first thing that popped into my head. I knew it was what I *wouldn't* wear. But, Helen, hurry! We're losing time. We must catch her before she gets there, and warn her."

With a little hopeless cry Helen left her dishes where they were, and hurried into her room. Cora's mother had already arrived to sit with Mrs. Bennett; and before many minutes had passed the two girls hurried away together.

"She'll have left the Library by the time we can get there, I'm afraid, even if she went there first," said Helen. "But we'll have to try. And she mustn't know—ever. We must get her away without her knowing why we do it. She'd never get over it—that you sent her picture like that. Oh, Cora, Cora! How could you do it!"

"I don't know, I don't know," moaned the girl, "only I was dead tired of stupidity, and thought this promised something interesting—just to go and watch him hunt around for that girl in white with a pink rose. I was sure I should recognize him from

his picture in the papers. But you know I'd never speak to him, or let him guess who I was—never. And to think that to-day, of all days, Kate should have gone to that old Museum, and in that fatal dress!"

At the Library door Helen met a woman whom she knew.

"Oh, how do you do, Helen?" the woman greeted her, brightly. "I've just been talking with your sister Kate."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" cried Helen, her countenance beaming. "Where is she?"

"Oh, she's gone now—quite a little while ago. She said they were going to the Museum," smiled the woman pleasantly, wondering as she turned away why Helen Bennett's face had grown so suddenly white and anxious looking.

. . . . . .

And the Fates veiled their eyes and seemed not to be noticing.

CHAPTER VI

And the Ball Still Rolls

IT was nearly three o'clock Saturday afternoon when John Newcomb and Tommy entered the Art Museum. That this day was the day upon which the original of the little girl in curls and muslin had said that she would be at the Museum, John Newcomb had entirely forgotten. If once he had remembered, the Museum most certainly would not have seen him that afternoon. He would have taken Tommy somewhere else for his holiday treat. The last thing John Newcomb wanted to do was to meet the writer of any of those abhorred letters, or the sender of any of those still more abhorred photographs. True, the little maid in curls and muslin had arrested his attention, and he had looked long and admiringly into the winsome little face. But even so, it was of the child—not the woman—that he was thinking. True, also, he had propped the little picture up on his mantelpiece; but for only one night had it stayed there, then it had been tucked away in his trunk, lest some one see it. Dodge had a way of dropping in, and of asking questions, and John Newcomb did not mean that he should ask questions about that. The picture once out of sight, he had forgotten all about it. And certainly it was far from his mind as he approached the Museum that Saturday afternoon in June.

"Well, Tommy, what do you think of this?" he asked the boy as they entered the Museum's imposing rotunda.

"Great! Bang up!" breathed Tommy. And John Newcomb, looking at the boy's rapt face, smiled content.

Systematically and determinedly now, John Newcomb, was trying to imbue Tommy with a desire for knowledge. He hoped to convince him that school would mean something besides the proper use of words—which Tommy, for some unapparent reason, seemed specially to hate. It was Newcomb's plan, therefore, to spend much time during the summer visiting museums, parks, and points of historical interest—for Tommy's sake. Curiously, though, he directly found his own blood tingling at the prospect, much to his surprise, for he had resigned himself to be bored. But he was not bored. John Newcomb did not realize, perhaps, that for the first time in his roving, irresponsible existence, the absorbing interest of doing something for somebody else had entered his life.

"Well, Tommy, this is great, all right," he agreed, as, after investing in a catalogue, he led the way to a room where imposing white figures towered on every side.

"Gee! But I'd hate ter be here in the dark with the moon shinin' in!" exclaimed Tommy. "I'd sure think 'twas ghosts I was seein'."

John Newcomb chuckled.

"Well, Tommy, judging from some of the dates I see around me, and in this little book here, I guess most of the ghosts have been laid too many years to come back and walk now."

"An' lots of 'em ain't whole, either," added

Tommy. "They hain't got any legs to come back with. I shouldn't think they'd have such a lot of smashed up things here in this nice house," he commented.

Newcomb laughed softly. Then, standing before a particularly "smashed up" piece of sculpture, he explained to Tommy, by aid of the book in his hand, how much interest there really was in this "mounted warrior" from the far-away time of 500 B.C.

"Whew!" whistled Tommy, wide-eyed and eager. "Say, I'd like to know more about that old guy!" And again John Newcomb smiled content.

On and on, through fascinating rooms and corridors strolled the man and boy, the one not a whit less happy or less interested than the other.

Suddenly, Tommy gave a low exclamation and darted to one side. The next instant he was out of sight behind a huge cabinet of Chinese porcelains.

John Newcomb, supposing that the boy had seen something to attract his attention, waited smilingly. His way was barred, indeed, by two persons who had stopped just ahead of him, a woman perhaps forty years old, and a pretty girl of twenty or more.

The girl was in white, with a pink rose in her hat. Her back was toward him, and he could not see her face; but there was something about the poise of her head that he liked. She was talking animatedly to the thin-faced little woman with her, and as he had nothing else to do at the moment he watched them idly, wondering, meanwhile, why Tommy did not come back.

He was still watching them when two girls hurried up from the other side and greeted them eagerly, and he heard the girl in white call the newcomers "Helen," and "Cora."

It was just as they started forward that the girl in white dropped her handkerchief. Instantly John Newcomb was at her side.

"I beg pardon, but I think you dropped—this," he said.

The girl turned, and smiled frankly straight into his eyes.

"Thank you," she murmured, "you are very kind." Then she went on with her friends.

John Newcomb stepped back with a puzzled frown on his face. There was an odd familiarity about the girl's eyes and smile. He felt as if he had seen them before, somewhere. But, of course, he had not. Certainly he never could have met that girl, and then have forgotten her. He——

Suddenly John Newcomb smiled. He recollected now. It was the little maid in curls and muslin. The eyes and the smile were like those in the picture; but, of course——

With a start John Newcomb suddenly remembered those words on the back of the photograph; he remembered, too, that it was to the Museum the girl had said she would go, and that the girl he had just seen was in white and with a pink rose—exactly the costume mentioned. Still it did not seem possible. He did not like to think of silly messages and clandestine meetings with unknown men in connection with this graceful, evidently charming girl, who seemed so much of a thoroughbred. After all, there was probably some mistake, he decided, as he turned a little anxiously to look for Tommy.

Tommy, however, did not come back. After a time, the man began a systematic search through long rooms and corridors.

Tommy, meanwhile, was standing by the big out-

side door, watching every one who passed through to the street. He was waiting for Uncle John—and also he was keeping a sharp lookout for some one else. Just ahead of him, some time before, he had seen a small, thin-faced woman in black, walking with a girl in white with a pink rose in her hat. Tommy, for reasons of his own, did not wish to meet the little woman in black just then. He had it all planned, indeed, just where he would run to hide if he saw her coming now. He was very glad, however, to see Uncle John coming first.

"Well, Tommy, I should like to know where you've been," demanded John Newcomb, trying to keep the sharpness out of his voice.

"Oh, I've been here, for quite a spell," answered Tommy, with cheerful evasiveness. "When I looked around for ye I couldn't find yer, so I came here. I thought I could catch ye on the way out."

"Well, that's all right, for this time," rejoined the man, frowning a little. "But I would suggest that hereafter you stay a little nearer me when we're out together. We might lose each other rather seriously sometime, Tommy."

"All right," nodded Tommy. "I guess most generally I can."

"Yes, I rather guess 'most generally' you can, Tommy," echoed the other whimsically, but emphatically.

When he got home John Newcomb went to his trunk and took out the photograph of the little girl in curls and muslin.

"They do look alike," he muttered, as he turned the photograph over, "and it *was* to-day. Well, I'd never have believed it in *her*," he finished indignantly, as he tossed back the picture and banged

down the cover of the trunk. Then, suddenly, he remembered the dropped handkerchief. Was it possible, after all, that she had recognized *him,* and had thus tried to attract his attention? This idea he dismissed at once, however, as he remembered his bearded face in the newspaper picture.

With a light heart, therefore, he went down to dinner with Tommy.

John Newcomb had a caller that evening—Dodge of *The Clarion.* This was nothing new of late. The two were, indeed, fast becoming friends. Unknown to Newcomb, Dodge had been to some pains to look up his new acquaintance's reputation in various quarters, and he was well pleased with what he had learned. Having a cousin in the little Vermont town where the bank-president uncle had lived and died, it was a simple matter to verify the story of Newcomb's youth, and of the uncle's peculiar will; and here, too, he learned nothing that was to John Newcomb's discredit.

"Well," greeted Dodge cordially, "how goes it, old fellow? Any more letters?"

Newcomb laughed dryly, and shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, they're slowing up a little; didn't have but six yesterday—one of those was from Montana. You don't mind that, I suppose, as it shows your broad circulation."

"Hm-m, maybe," conceded the other. "Still, you're likely to get responses from the very ends of the earth. Folks use the paper to wrap things in, and for packing, you know; so there's no telling where it won't turn up. How are the presents?"

"Falling off. Really, I'm getting encouraged on

those. Haven't had a lock of hair, either, for four days."

"Nor a photograph?"

"W-well, I have had those,—a few."

"Haven't found the wife yet, I suppose?" Dodge's voice was gentle and insinuatingly sympathetic.

Newcomb frowned.

"No. And I won't, either—that way, as you very well understand. Suppose we drop that subject now, Dodge," he suggested, as Tommy came into the room.

And so square was the set of his firm chin that Dodge, in spite of his almost irresistible love of a joke, changed the subject.

"Hm-m," he murmured, after a pause. "How do you like your job?"

"First rate."

"I saw old man Grow yesterday, myself. He thinks you're a peach."

"So? Well, I'm much obliged, I'm sure."

"Yes. He says you're the best find he ever struck. So you're solid there all right."

"I'm glad to hear it. I'm trying—to make good." Newcomb paused, then resumed a little diffidently. "To tell the truth, Dodge, I guess I am about ready to settle down. I've seen about all I want to of—the other side of that highest hill."

"Good! I guess we all come to that, some time."

There was another long pause during which Dodge fidgeted nervously about the room, and Newcomb helped Tommy with a picture puzzle.

"Look here! Seriously, old man," began Dodge, after a time, squarely facing his host, "Won't you let me introduce you to some girls—nice girls?"

For a moment there was no answer. Newcomb

was eyeing Tommy thoughtfully. It was strange, but Newcomb considered everything now in the light of Tommy.

"Well, I don't know. Perhaps we will," he began then, smilingly. "I think Tommy and I would like to know some girls—girls with homes and brothers, you know." John Newcomb was thinking of a family group he had seen pictured in the paper that day, and he was wishing Tommy might know such a group—it would be good for Tommy! Then, suddenly, he thought of something else.

"See here," he began in a low voice, making sure that Tommy, absorbed in his puzle, did not hear, "none of your mischief, now! You'll have to promise me that you won't tell any one about that will and its absurd condition, or I won't go a step with you—even for Tommy."

Dodge laughed, but his eyes showed sympathetic understanding.

"All right, it's a bargain, and I don't blame you. I know lots of nice girls—girls with homes and brothers, too. But I'm going to begin at the top and work down. I'm going to ask the Bennett girls to let me take you out there."

"Do they know me, *me*—the *Clarion* me?" demanded Newcomb, again with a glance toward the unheeding Tommy.

"They do not. They don't take *The Clarion,* as I happen to know. And if they did, they wouldn't have looked twice at that yarn."

"But they may have seen them—my name and my picture."

"Hardly think so. Besides, if they have, you're safe enough, now. Smooth-shaven, as you are, you don't look a bit like you did then, and as for your

name, that's common enough, even if they remembered it—which isn't likely they do."

"Where do they live?"

"Dorchester. And they're dears, both the girls and their mother. They've got a brother, too, only—well, I don't call him a dear, though, exactly. And there's a girl upstairs, Cora Dean. She's a mischievous, fly-away little thing, but she's all right at heart. They know lots of young folks, and once started there you'll be all right."

"Thank you; I'll go, if they'll let me. I'd like to. Then maybe, later, they'll let me bring Tommy," he added. "You see, Tommy needs friends even more than I do."

"Good!" exclaimed Dodge, reaching for his hat. "Now remember. I'll see the Bennetts this week, and I know they'll let you come, when I tell them."

"Look out now," cautioned the other. "You know what you're *not* to tell them."

"Sure!" grinned Dodge; then soberly: "And I won't tell them, Newcomb,—honor bright!" he promised.

. . . . . .

As if a promise—a little thing like a promise—could stand in the way when the Fates had pushed the Ball!

CHAPTER VII

Another Fence, But Down It Goes

WEDNESDAY noon Mrs. Polly Wheelock went home. And it was not until that afternoon that Cora Dean found a chance to speak to Helen concerning their meeting Kate in the Art Museum.

"Do you think Kate suspected—anything?" questioned Cora, fearfully.

"Why, no. Of course not! Why should she? There wasn't anything she could suspect," answered Helen. "We just fixed it so she didn't stay there long, that's all. But she didn't know we were doing it. Only I'm afraid Cousin Polly minded it—she wanted to see more. But she's coming down again pretty soon, and we'll take here there then."

"Well, the man didn't show up, anyhow," declared Cora. "At least, not while we were there. I know that. There wasn't a soul anywhere that looked one bit like him. And I'm glad."

"Glad! I should say so!" breathed Helen fervently. "It would have been perfectly awful if he had."

"But, really, it was funny, the way the thing came about—that Kate *did* go there in white with a pink rose, and on that very day, too!"

"It was very terrible," corrected Helen with severe emphasis, as Cora Dean danced merrily from the room.

Cora Dean, now that her prank had apparently resulted in nothing serious, was inclined to look at it all as a huge joke. Not so, Helen.

It was that evening that Dodge called. The Bennetts had known Herbert Dodge for some years—ever since, in fact, he had yielded to Kate's pleadings to keep thirteen-year-old Harold's name out of the papers in connection with some boyish scrape. They knew him then as "that kind young reporter"; but soon they discovered that he was the son of an old school friend of Mrs. Bennett.

The acquaintance between the young people ripened very quickly into friendship. The neighbours, noting the frequent visits of the good-looking young man to the home where there were two charming girls, scented a romance at once; but, as Dodge was devoted to both, it became the unsettled wager of the street—which girl he would marry. That he would marry one of them was taken for granted.

To-night, after he had been in to see Mrs. Bennett, Dodge chatted for awhile on the porch with Kate, Helen, and Harold. Then, a little abruptly, he presented a request.

"I've a friend I'd like to bring out sometime, if you'll let me," he said. "He's a forlorn chap, and quite alone in the world except for Tommy, a young nephew—at least the boy calls him 'Uncle,' so I suppose he's his nephew."

"Why, of course! Bring him, by all means," smiled Kate.

"Thanks. I hoped you'd let me," nodded Dodge. "He's a good fellow, and I'd like to infuse some fun into his life—some of this," he finished with a wave of his hands sweeping enough to include the homey little verandah, the table, the magazines, the pitcher

of lemonade, the two bright-faced girls, the boy strumming his banjo, and the purring cat on his own knee.

"What's his name?" asked Harold, picking more lightly at the strings of his instrument.

"Newcomb—John Newcomb." As he said the words Dodge threw a keen glance into each face in turn, then relaxed a little as he met no start or question that would indicate the name was other than strange to them all.

"What is he like?" asked Helen.

"He's like—well, he's like a fellow who has met with more hard blows than soft hands in the world; so I thought I'd like to show him some of the latter if I could,—yours, for instance."

"Mine!" laughed Helen. "You'll have to show him Kate's, not mine, if it's soft hands you're looking for. Dishes and dusting aren't half so softening to the hands as bonnet-building, you know."

"As if he, or any other man living, wouldn't prefer one of your pies to any six of my bonnets!" flashed back Kate, merrily.

"Well, I reckon pies *would* taste better," chuckled Harold. "And of course a fellow has to eat."

"You see," challenged Kate, "the way to a man's heart is through his stomach, even at Harold's age." Dodge laughed.

"Maybe. But, judging from what I've seen, the way to this man's heart is marked 'no thoroughfare.'"

"Well, really! How inhospitable of him!" gurgled a new voice. "Who is this you're talking about? My! But isn't it hot!" And Cora Dean tripped up the steps and dropped her dainty little white-clad

person into the nearest chair. "Now who did you say this diverting creature was?"

"A friend of Mr. Dodge, whom he's going to bring to call some evening," explained Helen.

"A man for whom Mr. Dodge is trying to find a pair of soft white hands," grinned Harold mischievously. "How are yours, Cora?"

Cora sighed in mock dismay, and spread the fingers of two, small and very pretty hands.

"Not for me! There are two hard spots on the palms, and the backs are as brown as an Indian's."

"Never mind," chuckled Harold. "You won't stand much chance, anyhow. You see, Kate's going to offer hers with a bonnet in them, and Helen's going to present hers with a pie."

"Harold, be still," remonstrated Kate, though she joined in the laugh that greeted his nonsense.

"I'm sorry my luckless reference to soft hands should have caused so much commotion," laughed Dodge. "And I didn't mean he was looking for them, either. He isn't."

"Is his heart really marked 'no thoroughfare'?" demanded Cora Dean, saucily.

Dodge laughed again as he rose to go.

"As to that—I'll have to let you find out for yourselves," he retorted merrily. "I'll bring him out next week, anyhow, then you can answer your own questions. Good night, everybody," he finished, as he bowed himself off.

On his way home the newspaper man chuckled softly to himself.

"Well, they don't know who he is, nor about that bothersome will, either," he declared under his breath, as he stood waiting for his car. "I've made sure of that." But he did not remember that it was

before, and not after, Cora Dean's arrival that the name, John Newcomb, had been spoken.

On a beautiful moonlit evening, less than a week later, Dodge piloted his friend to the Bennett porch.

As Kate Bennett, the only occupant of the porch at the moment, rose to greet him, John Newcomb gave an involuntary start unnoticed, however, by either of the others.

She was—*was* she the girl at the Museum? With an awkwardly muttered something John Newcomb seated himself and tried to look politely interested while he listened to the girl's talk with Dodge. He wished that her voice did *not* sound so much like that girl's at the Museum. He fancied, too, that she had a little nervous way with her hands that savored of embarrassment. But he could not help fearing that it came from the fact that his name, John Newcomb, was familiar to her—as familiar as it must be if she really were the girl in white with a pink rose at the Museum who had sent him a silly little message on the back of a photograph. Still, after all, it could not be she, he thought, as he watched her. As if this charming, well-bred, well-poised, *sensible* young woman could be guilty of a thing like that! Of course not!

Thoroughly reassured in his mind, he was just settling back to enjoy the conversation, when Miss Bennett turned with a smiling question:

"Didn't I see you, Mr. Newcomb, a week or two ago at the Art Museum?"

"At the—Art Museum?" stammered John Newcomb, miserably.

"Yes, I'm sure I remember seeing you," murmured Miss Bennett. "I dropped my handkerchief, and

you very kindly picked it up. Of course I may be mistaken, but I thought you looked like that man."

"D-did he? D-do I?" floundered John Newcomb, with the desperation of one who feels the last prop breaking beneath him. The next instant he caught a glimpse of Dodge's bewildered, annoyed face, and with a valiant effort he tried to collect his wits. He was not succeeding so well, however, that he was not ready to welcome any sort of diversion; so he rose with manifest alacrity when a light step sounded behind him, and Miss Bennett cried: "Oh, here are Helen and Cora."

The diversion, as it befell, however, was not so worthy of a welcome, after all, for "Helen and Cora" proved to be another shock, as unmistakably he recognized them as the two girls who had met the girl in white at the Museum that Saturday. In some way, however, he went through with the introductions, and resumed his seat. A little later a youth, whom they introduced as "Harold," came out of the house with his banjo and thrummed for them little soft tunes on its strings.

With a long breath then, John Newcomb began to look more freely about him. One by one his scattered wits returned.

It was such a happy, charming group, and certainly the most winsome and delightful member of it was the one called "Kate." The more he thought of it, the more nearly convinced he grew that not by any possible chance could she have been guilty of so silly a performance as the sending of that photograph. True, she was at the Museum that Saturday, and in white with a pink rose. But, after all, white with a pink rose was not an unusual costume for a June day. Doubtless there had been

many others like it there, if he had but noticed them. As for her resemblance to the photograph—that probably was a mere matter of his own fancy. At all events, this charming, altogether delightful Kate Bennett *could not* have been guilty of scribbling that unseemly message on the back of her photograph and sending it to a strange man—object: meeting and matrimony!

It was when he had reached this point in his mental argument that John Newcomb began to be more like himself. Little by little he felt his way into the conversation, even venturing on a jest once or twice, which met with prompt appreciation and response. To Harold he found himself giving an account of a skirmish with the natives in the Philippines; and when he realized that the others, too, were listening, he realized at the same instant that he was talking well, and with apparent ease. This gave him confidence, so that the tension somewhere within him loosened, and left him relaxed and relieved. He even, at Harold's importunity, accepted the banjo and sang a gay little Spanish song that he had learned at Manila.

"Well, John Newcomb," cried Dodge, when the song was ended, "why didn't you tell me you could sing like that?"

He did not see Cora Dean in the corner sit up suddenly at that name. Neither did John Newcomb see it. For that matter, no one noticed that the girl was looking from Dodge to Newcomb and back again to Dodge with wide-open, startled eyes.

"Really, I don't know. Why should I tell you?" laughed Newcomb. "I reckon I didn't think there was anything to tell, anyway," he finished, dashing into a lively "tum-tummy-tum-tum" on the banjo.

Over in the corner Cora Dean fell slowly back in the chair. Her eyes were on Newcomb's face now, unswervingly. In them dwelt questioning, a little terror, and a growing excitement. By and by Kate and Helen slipped into the house to prepare refreshments, and to make sure the little mother was not wanting something out of her reach. She had but to speak or to touch her bell, as they knew, and she could be easily heard from the porch. But the little mother saved their steps, when she could, and the girls knew it. So, to-night, Kate went directly to her mother's side while Helen went to the kitchen.

"Do we disturb you with our chatter, dear?" Kate asked.

"Not a bit. You never do. I like his voice, too—that friend of Herbert's. Is he nice? Do you like him?"

"Yes, he's very pleasant." Both women were speaking softly, that their words might not be heard on the porch outside.

"How old is he?"

"Why, I don't know; twenty-five or thirty, perhaps."

"What's his name, did you say?"

"John Newcomb."

"That's a good name. I like it—sounds solid. Tell him from me that I hope he'll sing again before he goes."

"I will. And isn't there anything else that you want?"

"Not a thing. If I do I'll ring or speak. Run along, dearie."

"All right. We're going to make lemonade and

some sandwiches," smiled Kate, as she went through the doorway. In the hall she met Harold and Mr. Newcomb.

"I'm going to show him my stamps," explained Harold in a gleeful voice. "He's been everywhere, pretty near, I guess."

Outside, on the porch, Cora Dean, left alone with Dodge, had suddenly sprung to her feet. With a quick beckoning of her hand she summoned the newspaper man to the extreme corner of the porch, the one farthest from Mrs. Bennett's window.

"Mr. Dodge, who's that man?" she asked peremptorily, but softly.

"Why, he's my friend, Mr. Newcomb." If Dodge was disconcerted by the question he did not show it.

"Mr. *John* Newcomb?"

"Certainly. The one we were talking about the other evening. Surely you've not forgotten that, Miss Cora?"

With an impatient gesture the girl brushed this aside.

"How long have you known him?"

Dodge stirred a little restlessly.

"Why, I don't know as I—can say. Not so very long, perhaps. But you don't have to know Newcomb long to find out he's a first-rate good fellow. Don't you like him? You seemed to. I thought you two were getting on famously."

This, too, the girl waved aside disdainfully.

"But there are *some* things you know that you aren't telling, Mr. Herbert Dodge, about this man. You know there are."

Again Dodge stirred restlessly. In spite of his apparent nonchalance, he had thrown a keen, swift glance once or twice into Cora's eyes.

" 'Things'? That I don't tell?" he bantered merrily. But the girl interrupted him.

"Listen," she flashed triumphantly. "That man is John Newcomb, the one with that queer legacy, and his picture was in *The Clarion* a month ago. I know he is. And he's got to get married by next year sometime to get his fortune of thirty thousand dollars. There! Now do you think I don't know what I am talking about?"

For one wretched moment Dodge tried to save the day.

"Why, Miss Cora, I—he—you—" But she interrupted him again.

"He is—he is. I know he is," she chanted softly, lightly dancing up and down on her toes. "It's the same name, and he looks like him even if he has shaved off his beard. I know he's the one." Then daringly she challenged: "If you don't tell me, I'll ask him!"

"Heavens! Miss Cora, don't you dare!" The man had actually grown white, and had caught her arm with agitated fingers. Then, with a fearful look over his shoulder, he demanded: "Do *they* know—the Bennetts?"

"No—not who he is."

"Then, for Heaven's sake, don't tell them! You little midget of mischief, you. Can you keep a secret?" he implored. "Newcomb is clean crazy on that subject. He simply will have nothing to do with any girl who knows *that*—about the fortune, I mean."

"Oh, won't he. Indeed!" bridled Miss Cora.

"No. Now will you keep the secret? I can assure you right now, that if you do tell, you've seen the last of him," threatened Dodge, with crafty shrewd-

ness, reading aright the look of eager excitement on the girl's pretty, but rather childish face.

"Sure I'll keep the secret—maybe," she pouted.

"You see, I promised not to give it away—that legacy business—else he wouldn't have come here at all," explained Dodge, feverishly.

"Indeed! He didn't sound like that—in the paper."

Dodge colored faintly.

"Well, I suppose that was my fault, though he gave me permission to make copy of his story all right. He didn't realize I was a newspaper man, I suspect, and he didn't suppose it was going to be like that. He was crazy when he saw it—and when the letters and truck began to come in."

"T-truck? What do you mean?"

"Oh, hatbands, and crocheted ties, to say nothing of the locks of hair, and photographs."

"Photographs!" Cora Dean gave a start. Then, with studied carelessness, she dissembled: "Why, what an idea! As if any girl could be so silly as that—and—and *hair,* too!"

"Well, there were. Plenty of them."

"Why, how—how do you know that?"

"Because I saw them."

"You *saw* them!" Cora Dean had difficulty in hiding her start this time. "Do you mean he *showed* them to you?"

"Sure—quantities of 'em, after I'd promised not to use them in the paper."

"Why, what an idea!" exclaimed the girl, with dry lips. "What—what sort of girls did—what did they look like?" she asked.

"All kinds—thin, fat, tall, short, homely, pretty. 'Pays your money and takes your choice.' "

Cora Dean laughed nervously. Her next question was lightly spoken; but as she asked it, her eyes furtively studied his face.

"But *big* girls, of course; there weren't any—*little* girls?"

"You mean, children?"

"Y-yes." Her voice trembled a little.

Dodge frowned impatiently.

"Yes—no—I don't know. I don't remember any; but we're off the track, Miss Cora. What I want is your promise not to give it away—about that confounded will."

The girl laughed joyously. She was suddenly very much herself again. There was nothing in her face now but mischief.

"Give it away? How?" she asked.

"To the Bennetts—anybody. He was very angry, as I said, when he found I'd put the story in the paper, and since then the silly letters he has received have made him actually morbid on the subject. He's so afraid some girl will marry him because of the money; or, that if he does fall in love and ask a girl to marry him she'll think *he's* after the money and asking her to marry him just to save the day for him. He won't look twice at a girl if he *knows* she knows—much less if she knows *he* knows she knows. There, is that clear?"

"So clear," murmured Cora; "like the—er—*nose* on your face."

The emphasis was unmistakable, and Dodge sniffed his disgust.

"That's about what I expected of you," he groaned, laughing in spite of himself. "Really, child, can't you be serious? I tell you this *is* serious."

"I should think it might be—to Mr. Newcomb."

"It is to me, too. I've given my word of honour not to tell anybody, any more; and I supposed I was honest in it. And I am honest, too. I'm not to blame because *you* found it out. But please, please, don't tell the Bennetts; then they'll just go on and get acquainted naturally, and it will put some wholesome fun into Newcomb's life. He needs it badly enough, poor chap, and—hush, here they are," he broke off as Harold and John Newcomb came through the doorway bearing a pitcher of lemonade and a tray with plates and glasses.

"We've been helping," announced Harold gayly. "The girls are coming in a minute with some sandwiches." And almost as he finished speaking the girls appeared, each with a well-laden plate.

The sandwiches and lemonade were wonderfully good. John Newcomb, breaking his third dainty triangle of bread and chopped ham, wished Tommy could have one, too. Perhaps the very strength of his wish made his eyes wistful. At all events, Kate, sitting next to him, said:

"Mr. Dodge tells us you have a young nephew with you, Mr. Newcomb."

"Nephew?"

"Yes, 'Tommy,' I think he called him."

"Oh, Tommy," smiled Newcomb. "Well, Tommy isn't exactly a nephew, though perhaps I think as much of him as if he were, Miss Bennett. You see, I had no brothers or sisters."

"Oh, that's too bad," murmured the girl, feeling suddenly very sorry for this big, lonely-looking fellow at her side, who had, apparently, no one nearer than a possible cousin to love. That Tommy was some distant relative she had concluded at once.

Just how Tommy had come to him, John New-

comb had no notion of telling. It seemed too much like parading the little good he was doing, to tell of it.

"You must bring him out here to see us sometime," suggested Kate; then she marvelled at the light that leaped at once to the man's eyes.

"Would you let me bring him, really?" he questioned. "You see, Tommy needs—this," he finished, sweeping the scene with his eyes.

Kate Bennett, watching him, remembered Dodge's words a few evenings before, and came promptly to the opinion that John Newcomb, fully as much as the unknown Tommy, needed "this." She made up her mind, too, that he should have it.

"We shall be glad to see you both," she cordially answered.

"Thank you," smiled the man, his eyes showing his gratitude. He hesitated, then he went on a little whimsically: "Maybe I'd better prepare you for Tommy. You see, Tommy hasn't had much of—this, and he may not quite know how to act when he gets it. You may think he's a little rough, but—well, it's just—this—that's needed to smooth him down; and—I'm not able to give him much of it in a ten-by-twelve boarding-house bedroom!"

"Just bring him out, then, as soon as you wish," said the girl, conscious of growing liking for this big, strong young fellow who had yet a heart tender enough to harbour a Tommy who was "a little rough" but needed "this."

Half an hour later, after another song from Newcomb, the two men said good-night to the girls, and a little later to each other. Still later Tommy awoke to find John Newcomb writing something down in a little red notebook.

"What yer doin'?" he queried drowsily.

"I'm writing down the names and addresses of those whom I'm pretty sure will become very good friends of ours, Tommy."

"Who are they?" Tommy was sitting up in bed now.

"The Bennetts. They live in Dorchester."

"I don't know 'em."

"No, but you will some day, I hope."

"Do you like 'em?"

"Very much."

"Will I like 'em?"

"I hope so."

"Why do you hope so?" This was asked with obvious distrust and suspicion.

"Oh, just—because," answered the man lightly. "Come, it's time you go back to sleep, Tommy."

"Are they nice folks?"

"They certainly are."

"Humph! I thought so," vouchsafed Tommy, falling back on his pillow. "Well, I ain't sure I'll like 'em, I guess. I hain't much use for nice folks."

John Newcomb smiled. He made no direct reply; but after a moment he observed impersonally:

"They had some fine sandwiches, and some lemonade that was just right, out there to-night. There's a boy there, too, a little bigger than you. He plays the banjo, and has a big collection of postage stamps."

"There is?" Tommy was sitting up in bed again now.

"Yes."

There was a moment's silence; then, a little slowly came the question:

"When, maybe, be you a-goin' out there again?"

"Oh, I don't know."

"Perhaps—next week?" (This was Saturday.)

"Perhaps."

There was another silence. Tommy lay back on his pillow.

"Oh, of course, maybe I'll like 'em," he said then, as if casually.

John Newcomb, for some reason, thought best not to reply; but he turned his back to hide a smile.

. . . . . .

And the Fates—the Fates turned their backs, also, to hide a smile.

CHAPTER VIII

A Bit More Slowly It Now Rolls

IT was Helen's turn to go to church the Sunday morning after John Newcomb's call. Kate and Helen always took turns in going to church. Even when the little mother was well enough to sit up in the wheel chair, they did not like to leave her alone. To be sure, there was Harold—but Harold had been left once with his mother. After that one of the girls stayed always.

Harold was very fond of his mother—he said. Certainly he kissed her affectionately, and inquired briskly: "Well, how's the little mother to-day?" It was Kate or Helen, however, who changed the pillows, brought the footstool, or went after fresh water. Even on the one Sunday he had been left with her, after an affectionate kiss and his usual cheery question, he had taken his book to the veranda, and promptly forgotten all about his mother. At least, when a school friend sauntered by and suggested a walk, Harold jumped up with alacrity, tossing his book to one side, grabbed up his cap and went along.

An hour later, Kate and Helen, came home from church and found the invalid alone, her medicine untouched (she was in bed that day), no water in the glass on the little stand, and not even a magazine within reach.

"Why, where's Harold?" demanded the girls.

"Oh, he—he just went for a little walk, I guess," answered the devoted mother cheerfully. "I heard Fred Leonard speak to him and ask him to go."

"But, *you!*" cried Kate.

"Oh, I'm all right," insisted the invalid.

"Yes, you look it!" exclaimed Kate, glancing at the clock and reaching for the delayed medicine at the same time.

"Harold is so thoughtless," sighed Helen, picking up the empty water glass hurriedly.

"But he's such a dear, affectionate boy!" declared his mother.

"Oh, yes, he's affectionate," sighed Kate, in her turn.

Half an hour later Harold came in and gave his mother a kiss. He said it was a shame, so it was, that he had forgotten the medicine; but he wouldn't again. No, indeed! And he didn't. Kate and Helen saw to it that he had no opportunity.

To-day Helen came into the room to say good-bye before leaving for church. She looked very pretty in her simple white dress and hat. Kate had put in a new spray of pale blue flowers where the pink rose had been.

"That blue looks lovely. It's just the color for you," said Kate with a critical glance.

"Yes, I like it better than the pink," nodded Helen. "And the pink looks so good in yours it would be a shame to take it out now."

After Helen had gone, and Kate had made her mother as comfortable as possible, Kate took up the well-worn Bible and held the little bedroom service that was always so dear to the woman who had in days gone by loved her church and worked for it untiringly.

It was at the close of this little service that Mrs. Bennett asked hesitatingly:

"Did Harold go to church with Helen to-day?"

"No, mother. He said he had a headache."

Mrs. Bennett sighed.

"Again? Kate, I think Harold ought to see the doctor."

Kate flushed; but she answered lightly:

"Oh, I wouldn't worry, mother. I don't think Harold is sick."

"But you know he's studying so hard to catch up with his class."

Kate did not answer. Her face was still a little red—perhaps because she stooped to pick up a pin at that moment.

"Was he very late Friday night?" Mrs. Bennett asked.

"Well, later than sometimes."

Mrs. Bennett patted the bedspread restlessly.

"Kate, I don't think that tutor ought to keep Harold so late evenings," she complained.

"No, mother."

"It's worse than when school was keeping, and he used to stay out evenings, studying with the boys."

"I'm sorry, dear. Perhaps he won't do it long. Now, come, little mother, don't you think you could sleep a bit, for a change?" Kate's voice was anxious. Her face was still flushed. Kate did not wish her mother to talk more of Harold just then. The girl had her own suspicions concerning this "studying" that Harold was doing evenings, and, above all things, she did not wish her mother to share them.

"No, I'm not sleepy," declared Mrs. Bennett, "but I am worried about Harold. I would rather he'd never catch up with his class than to study himself

to death. Kate, how did you like that Mr. Newcomb last night?"

"Why—very well, I think, mother."

"I'm glad. I hope maybe he'll be good for Harold. They seemed to like each other. Harold says Mr. Newcomb promised him some stamps."

Kate smiled.

"Yes, I think he would be good for Harold," she agreed. "He likes boys, I imagine. He has a young cousin, or something, with him whom he seems to think the world of. I asked him to bring the boy out here sometime soon."

"I'm glad. Maybe he'll be good for Harold, too."

"We'll hope he will." Kate smiled, but she sighed, too. She was thinking of how Harold looked when he came in at midnight the Friday before,—it had been something more than study that had brought that flush to his cheeks and that sparkle to his eyes.

"Dear Harold," sighed Mrs. Bennett, turning her adoring eyes to where his picture hung with the rest of her children's likenesses on the wall. Mrs. Bennett so loved those pictures! They were all there; Kate, Helen, and Harold, from babyhood up; and she spent much of her time looking at them and thinking how she loved them—her three dear children.

. . . . . .

And the Fates, their eyes, too, on the pictures, smiled—for one was the picture of a little maid of five in curls and muslin.

CHAPTER IX

Down a Hill and Up a Hill

DURING the first two or three days following his visit to the Bennett home, John Newcomb thought often of the pleasant evening he had spent there. He wondered, too, just how soon he might go again—and take Tommy.

Tommy seemed very happy these days. Much to his joy the new landlady, Mrs. Merrill, had also found errands and light work for him to do half the day, and that brought him a little money that he could call his own.

Tommy had very decided ideas about independence, as John Newcomb soon found out. Tommy, if you please, was paying John Newcomb five cents a day for his "board and keep," as he termed it. And John Newcomb, after some thought, decided that it was best to accept the money. To be sure, there were some other expenditures for sundry garments and necessities not found in Tommy's bandanna parcel. Tommy said that he could not settle with Uncle John for these now, but that he would some time later. To which John Newcomb gave grave consent.

Often the two took a walk or a trolley-car ride together after dinner, though for two or three evenings of late John Newcomb had to work.

It was upon one of these evenings, the night be-

fore the Fourth, that John Newcomb, hurrying to catch his car, turned aside to avoid a merry crowd of half-drunken revellers making the night hideous with their hoots and yells. He had almost passed them when, with a start, he recognized among them the face of young Harold Bennett.

The boy had plainly been drinking. His hat was at a rakish angle, and his necktie was under one ear. He was evidently at the "silly" stage, for he was laughing at nothing, and tossing inane remarks right and left.

For only a moment John Newcomb hesitated, then he elbowed his way into the crowd and touched young Bennett's arm.

"Hello, Bennett! How are you? I'm John Newcomb. Don't you remember? I was out to your place the other night."

The boy turned unsteadily. At first there was no sign of recognition in his eyes; then he gave a silly laugh.

"Oh, yesh!—Newcomb. I remember you," he gurgled thickly. "Played banjo—sh-ang! Good—come on! We're out for a l-lark."

Newcomb shook his head.

"Can't. Haven't time. Besides, it's late. Let's go home instead. Come on. I'll go with you."

The boy gave a hoot of derision and wagged his head.

"Don't wantsh ter go home. Go home any ole time—when can't go—anywhere elsh. I'm sthudying—I am—sthudying. I likesh ter sthudy!" And he gave another hoot of derision.

Just how it was finally accomplished, John Newcomb could scarcely have told; but at last he had the boy to himself, and they were on their

way to Dorchester. It had been no easy task, however, and it was after midnight when they came in sight of the Bennett home.

It had been John Newcomb's intention to keep in the background himself. He meant only to see that the boy was admitted without he himself being seen; but as they approached the house he saw a bright light in the hall. He saw Kate Bennett, too, on the veranda, looking anxiously up and down the street. Even then he would have stepped back into the shadow had she not at once ran down the steps and hurried toward them.

"Harold! Oh— Why, Mr. Newcomb!" she exclaimed.

"Yesh—Newcomb—nisch fellah! Brought him home with me," muttered Harold.

John Newcomb saw the girl's face turn white in the moonlight, and his heart ached for her.

"Oh, Harold, how could you?" she choked.

"He'll be all right—in the morning, I'm sure," stammered Newcomb miserably, wondering if there was anything he could say that would be any sort of help.

In a moment they had reached the steps. Harold was walking quite by himself now, without support.

"Harold, please—don't wake mother," begged the girl softly.

She went with him till he entered the hall, then she turned, evidently to speak to John Newcomb who had stopped at the foot of the steps. But the man, knowing that anything she could say would only make it harder for her lifted his hat with a low "good-night" and hurried away.

He found Tommy wide awake when he reached home.

"I heard a fire-cracker, I know I did. Say, Uncle John, can't I get up and go out? It is the Fourth now, isn't it?"

"Yes, it's the Fourth. But, Tommy, I'm dead tired. Do you mind staying in a little while, while I get a bit of sleep? Then in the morning we'll go out."

"Sure, I'll stay, Uncle John; 'course!" And he lay contentedly back on his pillow.

And John Newcomb smiled his satisfaction. John Newcomb had long since learned that Tommy would do almost anything as a favor, while a "must not" or "you shall" turned him instantly into a stubborn bit of adamant.

Tommy had a wonderful day the Fourth, from the pop of his first fire-cracker in the morning to the swish of the last rocket at night. In the forenoon, with Uncle John, he saw a most marvellous parade of "horribles" (which Tommy thought to be anything but horrible). In the afternoon he went to Revere Beach, had a ride on a merry-go-round, watched the bathers, and listened to a band concert. In the evening he saw the fireworks on the Common. It was in the evening, too, that he saw the drunken man.

"Uncle John, did you ever get drunk?" he asked.

"Eh! What?" Uncle John seemed to be lost in thought.

"I say, did you ever get drunk?" repeated Tommy.

For a moment there was no answer. Tommy, looking into Uncle John's face, saw that it had suddenly grown very stern and grave.

"Perhaps, in days gone by, I have been drunk—once or twice, Tommy," he answered slowly at last.

"However,"—he lifted his head determinedly—"I'm not going to drink any more, Tommy, never again."

"Why not?"

"I couldn't,—now, Tommy."

But Tommy was not even listening. His eyes were on a gorgeous burst of stars that glowed blue and red against the sky.

"Oh-h! Uncle John, look at it!" exclaimed Tommy in a transport of delight; then in disappointment, as "Good-night" flashed out in the dark: "Gee! an' that's the end of it!"

For several days after the Fourth, John Newcomb wondered if ever again now he would see the Bennetts, or if ever he might take Tommy there to show him a real "home." Without a special invitation he did not quite like to go—after that memorable meeting at midnight. At least, he did not like to go of his own initiative.

In less than a week, however, his hopes were answered; for Dodge came again and asked him to go with him to the Bennetts. And John Newcomb went, albeit he went with a tremour of uncertainty in his heart, and he did not take Tommy.

He was longing, yet dreading, to see Kate Bennett. She would think of Harold, of course, when she saw him, he knew that. He thought he knew the look that would come to her eyes. There would be pain and embarrassment in them; and John Newcomb did not want pain and embarrassment in Miss Kate Bennett's eyes when they met his.

A little fearfully, therefore, he stepped forward to greet Miss Bennett, when he had followed Dodge up the porch steps.

"You see, I 've brought him again," announced

Dodge, cheerfully, by way of introduction as Kate Bennett rose to greet them.

The next moment Newcomb found Kate Bennett's hand in his, and Kate Bennett's voice was saying:

"And we're very glad you did bring him!"

John Newcomb saw her eyes then. The pain was there; yes, and the embarrassment. But only for a moment. Then came such a look of gratitude and real friendliness that he felt his throat tighten so that he could hardly give utterance to his words in answer to her welcome.

It was after Cora Dean had come down, and the chatter and laughter had become quite general and a little noisy, that Kate turned to Newcomb under cover of their own quieter corner and said in a low voice:

"I can't begin to say how much I thank you for—for the other night."

"Miss Bennett, please don't," he begged.

"But I must say it. I want to," she began again, hurriedly. "It means so much to us—to all of us; and the way it was done, and all. And it was more than just bringing him home. It's going to mean a lot to Harold, too. I'm sure it is. He was ashamed. And to have you find him like that! He said he was. And he has promised—promised faithfully, never to let a thing like that happen again. I—I wanted you to know."

"Thank you. I—I'm sure I'm glad," murmured Newcomb, "but, please, please say no more."

She shook her head.

"But there's something else I want to say," she hurried on. She paused until the gay badinage of Dodge and Helen and Cora Dean became again noisy

enough to cover her words. "I want you to know, too, how Harold admires you and looks up to you."

"Miss Bennett!"

"Oh, of course, to you that means nothing—a mere lad like Harold," she interposed quickly. "But to us it's a great deal—everything. To have him admire *you,* a steady, substantial young business man, whom we can *trust!*"

A queer little noise, half cough, half choke, came from John Newcomb's throat; but Miss Bennett hurried on without apparently noticing it.

"We're so thankful! You see, it's usually some one quite different that takes his fancy; an actor, or a race-track man, or a ball player. And I'm always so afraid he—he'll go off with some of them. While you—we feel we can depend on you. You—you'll stay put," she finished, with a whimsical smile.

"But—but—" began Newcomb, stammering helplessly.

"And so I hope you won't mind—letting Harold be with you, some, Mr. Newcomb."

"Indeed, no! I shall be glad to have him," cried Newcomb, with the haste and relief of a man who feels himself again on sure ground.

"Thank you. Then I hope you'll come out—come often. And bring Tommy. I want to see——"

She did not finish her sentence, for Cora Dean called across a gay sally to Kate Bennett, and there was no further opportunity for quiet words by themselves.

But when John Newcomb rose to go that evening, Kate Bennett said:

"Now, remember, please, you're to bring Tommy to see us soon."

"Thank you. I shall be glad to, and I'll do it," agreed John Newcomb promptly.

And he fulfilled his promise just three days later. He went alone this time with Tommy.

"Will—they have sandwiches and lemonade?" questioned Tommy, as they drew near the Bennett house.

"Can't say as to that," answered John Newcomb, "but I wouldn't worry, Tommy. There'll be something there to interest you, never fear."

And there was.

Tommy was interested at once in the homey veranda with its red-cushioned chairs, in the cat with the prodigious purr, and in Harold and the banjo. He was interested, too, in a bag of peanuts which Miss Helen produced. But there was something more than interest on his face when Miss Kate Bennett came out, smilingly taking his hand, and telling him she was glad to see him. There was questioning, and there was a look almost of uneasiness—or fear.

Even Kate Bennett herself noticed it.

"Why, Tommy, what is it?" she smiled. "Why do you look at me like that?"

Tommy wriggled uneasily.

"Nothin'. I was just wonderin'," he answered.

"Wondering what?"

Again Tommy wriggled uneasily.

"I was just tryin' ter think? It seems as if I'd seen ye somewheres, an' I was tryin' ter think where 'twas."

Kate Bennett laughed and shook her head.

"Some other girl, Tommy—surely was! Certainly I never saw *you* before," she bantered.

"Well, maybe," vouchsafed Tommy. "Probably

it's just that I saw somebody what looks like ye," he finished, his face clearing with relief.

But not so John Newcomb. His face did not clear. He had changed colour and frowned at Tommy's audible wondering as to where he had seen Kate Bennett. He was still frowning when Tommy sat back satisfied.

John Newcomb knew. John Newcomb understood. Tommy had seen Kate Bennett very probably at the Art Museum that Saturday afternoon when she had gone there in white with a pink rose. Not that he should inform them of it now, however. Certainly not! He was trying to forget it—the whole annoying, inexplicable occurrence. Not that he believed now, of course, that that photograph with the silly message was hers!—but certainly it would be the last thing that he wanted to talk about, when he was trying to put the entire episode out of his mind.

He let it pass, therefore, and did not volunteer the information as to where Tommy had seen Miss Kate Bennett. But the irritable frown was still on his face for some minutes after the subject of the conversation had been changed.

. . . . . .

But the Fates still smiled, and wisely shook their heads.

CHAPTER X

In Pastures New and Pastures Old the Ball Roams at Will

THE month of August—for the Bennetts and some others—flew wonderfully fast. The weather was fine, which made possible many trips to the shore and moonlight sails down the harbour. Sometimes Kate went and sometimes Helen. There were times when both went; but those were when Mrs. Dean came down from upstairs and said that she had absolutely nothing to do all day or evening but to sit with dear Mrs. Bennett and to attend to anything she might need.

Usually Cora Dean and Harold made two of the pleasure party with, whenever possible, Dodge, or Newcomb, or both, for escort, and very frequently Tommy. Dodge's vacation came in August, and for John Newcomb there were the Saturday half-holidays and the evenings, of all which he made the most.

John Newcomb called very frequently on the Bennetts now. Sometimes he came with Dodge, sometimes with Tommy, and sometimes alone. He and Harold were becoming very good friends. Newcomb was finding it not hard at all to win the boy. Harold was more weak than wicked, as Newcomb had suspected, and, as he had also suspected, half the trouble was that he had be-

come scornful of "petticoat rule" and was longing to be "a man among men." Unmistakably he had taken a strong fancy to Newcomb; and Newcomb, much to his satisfaction and at the same time somewhat to his embarrassment and alarm, found that his word and will were law and gospel to the boy. It was all very well, of course, and very flattering—this using him for a pattern, but how about the pattern? How about his own liberty? Rather an uncomfortable sort of a life to lead—that of always being a pattern!

It was a constant source of wonderment—and sometimes of irritation, it must be confessed—to Newcomb, the position in which he found himself.

It had begun with Tommy. He talked, walked, stood up and sat down, not unconsciously as he wanted to, but consciously as he wanted Tommy to walk, talk, stand up and sit down. Longing for the free out-of-doors, he went to church every Sunday morning. Longing for his pipe and his cigar, he denied himself more than half the time. Tingling at times with the old restlessness to be off and away, he yet prattled to Tommy of the supreme desirability of the steady job and the sure "raise." Sometimes, but not often, he tried to get the boy to go back to his people; but Tommy always silenced him with: "Why had I ought ter go home? There ain't nobody there that cares—now." And to this Newcomb could find within him no answer, especially as his own heart yearned for the boy to stay where he was.

And now to Tommy there was added Harold. For Harold he must now talk, walk, stand up, and sit down—not as he wanted Harold to, however, but as he thought Kate wanted him to. It was no in-

significant job, either; it was a man-size job and one decidedly worth the doing; and one, too, that he would not have parted with for all the gold in the world, notwithstanding his discomfiture at times at this high elevation on which he found himself.

As was expected, perhaps, John Newcomb's frequent visits to the Bennett home caused the street no little agitation. As in the case of Dodge, the neighbours immediately scented a romance; but they were even more undecided than before as to the outcome now that there were two apparently devoted admirers on the field of contest. The frequent presence, too, of Cora Dean complicated matters; for were there not three young women now, and only two young men?

For some weeks John Newcomb enjoyed the good things in general that seemed to have come into his life, and did not stop to question whether any one thing in particular, or any one person in particular, contributed the lion's share to his enjoyment. He liked the delightful home atmosphere, the cozy porch, the cat. He liked Helen's lemonade, and Kate's dainty little way of serving it; and he liked the merry jests that seemed to fall spontaneously from Cora Dean's red lips. He liked it all, both for himself and for Tommy.

He had almost forgotten his panic over his recognition of Kate Bennett as the girl in white at the Art Museum. He long ago decided that her presence there in that costume was a mere coincidence, and that it had nothing whatever to do with the photograph of the little girl in curls and muslin.

The episode of his picture and story in the paper, John Newcomb hoped was now forgotten. The letters had ceased; and with nothing to feed upon it

looked as if the affair was about to die a natural death. The man hoped so, certainly. He owned to himself that he had been morbid about it; and he knew that half the charm of his present intercourse with Dodge's friends was due to the fact that he was so sure they were not aware of the condition of that embarrassing will. About the will itself he did not allow himself to think. He told himself loftily that he preferred to let matters take their natural course and if ever the right girl should come into his life he would be free to think of her happiness, and of his own, unhampered by thoughts of money; and he really believed that he was heart-free—until one day so simple a thing as a bunch of sweet peas brought him short up to a full stop.

It was Dodge who had the peas first—a huge bunch, all nearly pink and white; and Newcomb had met him face to face.

"Well, well! but you have blossomed out! And aren't they beauties!" he exclaimed.

"You bet they are!" crowed Dodge. "And why shouldn't they be? They are for the Queen Sweet Pea of the bunch—they are!" And he went off whistling the hoary "She's my sweetheart—I'm her Joe," of which tune—oddily enough for so up-to-date a fellow—he was particularly fond.

John Newcomb had not thought of the peas again until that night. He went out to the Bennetts that evening, and there he saw them in Kate Bennett's belt. She was wearing a pink-sprigged muslin, and the sprigs and the peas matched charmingly. The sight of those sweet peas in her belt disturbed John Newcomb most decidedly all that evening. But he pulled himself together enough to say good-night and then went home—to think.

So she, Kate Bennett, was the "Queen Sweet Pea" to Dodge. Dodge had said it, and he himself had seen it—the sweet peas in her belt. Well, why not?

John Newcomb began to see, then, many things; and yet, in a way, they all resolved themselves down to one—Kate. He liked the Bennetts because she was one of them; the porch was homey because she was on it; he liked Helen because she made lemonade for Kate to serve; he even liked the cat, especially because the cat so plainly liked Kate. And now this Kate, this all-too-beautiful Kate, belonged to Dodge. Well, why not? Why not, indeed!

Half that night and all the next day John Newcomb asked himself that same question over and over again, and tried to make himself realise that there was indeed no reason why Kate should not belong to Dodge. But he had not come to any really satisfying conclusion when he and Tommy went out to the Bennetts late that afternoon.

A picnic supper and a trip to one of the beaches had been arranged for the evening. All seven were to go: Helen, Kate, Cora Dean, Dodge, Harold, John Newcomb, and Tommy. Mrs. Dean was to sit with Mrs. Bennett that evening while they were away.

John Newcomb had decided that this would be an excellent opportunity for him to convince himself that there was, indeed, no reason why Miss Kate Bennett should not belong to Mr. Herbert Dodge; and with this thought in mind he very skillfully manœuvred so that the two should be together on every possible occasion during the trip. He himself occupied his time in being specially attentive to Helen Bennett and Cora Dean, leaving Harold and Tommy to take care of each other.

Before the evening was over, however, John New-

comb found out that so far as convincing himself was concerned it was useless to try. He realized that in spite of his forced attentiveness to Helen and Cora and his talks with them, he had thought only of Kate. In spite of Helen's cleverness and Cora's prettiness, he had seen only Kate. In spite of the deliciousness of the luncheon, it was all as sawdust to his tongue until he ate a strawberry tart which Kate said she had made, and promptly he ate six tarts. Indeed—in spite of everything—he could see, hear, think, and feel only Kate; and nowhere could he discover the smallest possible reason why she should belong to Dodge.

Gloomily, however, he admitted that she did belong to Dodge; and determinedly he tried to live up to that creed during the week that followed the picnic. In pursuance of this determination, not for some days did he go to the Bennetts' home. He took Tommy, then, one evening, and left so abruptly on Dodge's arrival that Dodge, meeting him the next day in the Public Garden, laughingly began to ask questions.

"Where's Tommy?" he began, sitting himself on the bench at Newcomb's side.

"Over by the pond, watching the boats."

"Hm-m. Well, old chap, you—you left early last night," he hazarded. "Pray, why?"

"Why, I—I just did. That's all," evaded John Newcomb, lamely.

"Oh, we knew *that*—that you 'just did,'" laughed the newspaper man. "What we didn't know, though was why. We missed you."

"Missed me! You must have!" In spite of his efforts to the contrary, there was a tinge of bitterness—of sarcasm—in John Newcomb's voice.

Dodge stared frankly.

"Why, Newcomb! What's up? What's the matter?"

"Nothing."

"Shucks! I know better. You aren't given to flying off on a tangent for nothing. The sarcasm of that remark of yours fairly singed my hair."

"What remark?"

"That we must have missed you—only you didn't say it that way."

Newcomb gave a dry laugh.

"Didn't I? Well, really, you know, you can't make me think you did miss me—among so many."

Unexpectedly Dodge turned squarely around on the bench and faced his friend.

"By Jove, man! You've hit it!" he exploded. "'Among so many'—that's it—'among so many'!"

It was Newcomb's turn to stare. There was a curious depth to Dodge's voice that told of an earnestness quite out of proportion to the words. Newcomb said nothing, however, and in a moment the other man continued, whimsically, though a little bitterly.

"Good Lord! Newcomb. Did you ever—no, you never did, of course. But did a man ever before, I wonder, try to court a girl who had such an ever-present family as the Bennett family, to say nothing of having also such a never-leaving shadow as Cora Dean is?"

Newcomb stiffened. Unconsciously he braced himself.

"They are—rather devoted," he conceded.

"'Devoted!' By Jove, that doesn't half express it, Newcomb. It needs a brand-new word to express it, a new word coined for just such a case. How

is a fellow to court a girl who is surrounded like that? One doesn't really like to sing out over the heads of the bunch: 'Here! you girl in the centre there, I love you. Won't you please be my wife?' "

"No, I suppose not," answered Newcomb, with a dry smile.

"Well! I'll have to, I fancy, if I get her at all," grumbled Dodge. "Oh, I'll acknowledge I'm not making any secret of my feelings," he added a little sheepishly. "But, what's the use? You've seen it, of course. Every one has. I heard yesterday that half the neighborhood had a wager with the other half as to whether I'd win out, or not; only they couldn't agree on which girl it was, so they had split over that. Nice business, isn't it?—to feel that you're dragging your sweetheart's name into controversies like that! You can't so much wonder at them, though. So far as appearances go I might be courting Cora Dean, or—or even Harold, the little rascal! The whole blooming bunch is present!"

"Yes, I know," nodded Newcomb, devoutly wishing that Dodge would find something to talk about other than his love for Kate Bennett.

But Dodge was not ready to find another subject just then to talk about. He was too much interested in this one. His grievance had been preying on his mind too long, and he was finding the telling of it was too great a relief for him to want to stop now.

"Why, see here!" he chafed, "I can't give her anything, nor take her anywhere, nor say anything to her, that I'm not sure won't have to be split up for the bunch! And, it's not her fault. They're all in it. It's that they all take everything so for granted. Of course, unselfishness and family 'devotion' are beautiful—in their place,—but I think

there are times when a little less—or more—would come in very nicely on the part of the family when, for instance, a girl is being courted. If I ask her to go anywhere she thanks me, joyously, and says, 'They'd love to' or, she'll 'See how many can go.' And when the time comes, what do I get? I get her sister, maybe, and Cora Dean, probably, and quite likely Harold; but I'm mighty lucky if I get her—the one I asked—at all!"

"Hm-m! Well, I suppose that is so," murmured Newcomb, staring straight ahead of him.

"Then, there are the things I give her," went on the newspaper man, aggrievedly. "If I take her candy, Harold eats it up. If I take her a calendar Mrs. Bennett has it on her wall—not that I begrudge the poor soul that, of course, but it's the principle of the thing I'm talking about. If I take her a book I find Cora Dean reads it first. Why, even those sweet peas I gave her the other day—I doubt if she kept even one of them. She gave them to her sister."

"What!" exploded John Newcomb, suddenly ceasing to stare straight ahead of him but turning sharply to Dodge instead.

"I said she gave them to her sister."

"Why, I saw them myself in Miss Kate's belt," declared Newcomb.

"Well, of course you did," retorted the other tartly. "I don't know who could help seeing them there. She said they matched her gown so beautifully that Helen declared she ought to have them. But I didn't give them to Kate. I gave them to Helen," snapped Dodge, a bit ungraciously.

"To Helen!" exclaimed Newcomb, with a dazed look which speedily gave place to one of overwhelming joy as he hastily summoned all his wits to aid

him in hiding his joyous surprise. "To be sure you did—and she deserved them too,—and it was a shame she couldn't keep them," he prated airily. "Helen is a mighty fine girl, and I hope you will win out. I—I'm sure you will, too!"

"Thanks," said Dodge, feelingly, yet wondering a little at this sudden outburst of sympathy, and confidence in his success, from one who but a moment before had been so impassive.

"And, oh, I say," hinted Newcomb, blithely, as Tommy appeared down the path coming toward them, "maybe I can help take up the attention of the sister—and the rest—eh?"

"Maybe, but I doubt it," said Dodge sceptically. "You didn't succeed very well on the picnic last week. There were too many for you."

"Eh? What?—Oh! you wait and see," smiled Newcomb.

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And, as he spoke, the Fates gave the Ball another gentle, gentle push.

CHAPTER XI

Ahead of the Ball, Apparently, Leads a Long White Way

AT once John Newcomb set about his voluntary, but very congenial, task of "helping Dodge." Promptly and systematically he laid plans whereby Dodge and Helen might be left to each other on their pleasure trips. Newcomb's task was easier in one respect than it might have been; for the last week of August had come and Harold was away camping with friends for two weeks, thus eliminating one of the troublesome features of the case. Aside from Tommy, Newcomb had now only Miss Kate and Cora Dean whose attentions must be occupied; and very quickly and very easily he found this could be accomplished, and with great pleasure to himself as well.

It was not long, however, that this task of "helping Dodge" served as a subterfuge for blinding Newcomb to the truth of how matters actually stood. He knew and admitted to himself that it was not Dodge he was planning and scheming to help, but *John Newcomb*. Much more ardently than he wanted Helen for Dodge he wanted Kate for himself—and he wanted her entirely to himself as well. He was beginning to chafe at the constant presence of Cora Dean, and he found himself contriving all possible ways to leave her for the entertainment of Tommy.

An arrangement not always to either Cora's or Tommy's liking.

Then, very suddenly one day, Tommy was counted out, or rather, Tommy counted himself out.

It was the first Sunday in September, and a particularly beautiful day.

"Well, Tommy, what do you say? Shall we go out to see the Bennetts this afternoon?" John Newcomb asked, going on with his preparations as if already he had the answer he was expecting. The next moment, however, he stopped short and turned around, for Tommy had answered:

"No, I guess I won't to-day, if you don't mind. I—I'd rather go down to the Public Garden."

"Why, Tommy!" exclaimed the man. "Nonsense, boy. Of course you'll go with me. Why, Tommy, I told them Friday we'd go out to-day, if 'twas pleasant. We're planning to go down the harbour to Nantasket."

Tommy wet his lips and swallowed.

"Yes, sir; I know, sir. And *you* can. It's just me —I ain't goin'. I'd rather go down to the Garden, honest. And Charlie Merrill's goin'. He said he was. An' you said I could go ter places with Charlie. An', besides, I was out ter the Bennetts yesterday, anyway."

"Yes, I know, but——"

John Newcomb paused, and for a few minutes went on silently with his shaving. Then he turned again to urge the boy.

But Tommy was obdurate. Tommy did not wish to go to the Bennetts nor to Nantasket to-day. Tommy much preferred the Public Garden and Charlie.

A little annoyed, therefore, and more than a little

puzzled, John Newcomb started off alone at two o'clock to keep his promise to the Bennetts.

John Newcomb could not understand this notion of Tommy's at all. When before had the boy refused to go out to the Bennetts? Why, he had always been more than eager to go. He had even been running out by himself at times, as he had gone only the day before. And Tommy thought the world of the Bennetts; John Newcomb was sure of that. And the Bennetts were doing Tommy a world of good; John Newcomb also knew that. What John Newcomb did not know, however, was what had happened the day before, when Tommy had gone out to Dorchester himself to see them.

Tommy had found only Mrs. Bennett and Miss Helen at home. Miss Kate had gone to the North Station to meet a cousin, Miss Helen had said. She gave Tommy a wonderful brand-new picture puzzle then, and left him on the veranda while she went in to frost some little cakes for supper. She told Tommy that when the frosting was hardened she would bring out a cake to him. But Tommy did not get his cake. He had his picture nearly completed when he chanced to look down the street. He saw Miss Kate Bennett coming toward the house, and with her was a slender little woman in a dark blue dress with a white wing in her hat.

Tommy took another look at the woman in dark blue, then without a sound he slipped over the side railing of the veranda, dropped to the ground, and disappeared around the rear corner of the next house.

But all this is what John Newcomb did not know.

On this Sunday afternoon John Newcomb found a stranger on the Bennett veranda. She was sitting

there with Miss Helen and was introduced to him as "our cousin, Mrs. Wheelock."

Mrs. Wheelock was a wistful-eyed, pleasant little woman who, for some time, vaguely puzzled Mr. John Newcomb as to whether or not he had met her before, when, with a frown, he remembered. She was the one who had been with Kate Bennett that baneful day at the Art Museum. John Newcomb always frowned when anything reminded him of that occasion.

Mrs. Wheelock did not go with them on the Nantasket trip. She insisted upon staying at home with Mrs. Bennett and letting "the girls" go. And it was on the boat, sailing down the harbour, that Kate Bennett said:

"Cousin Polly has come to stay all winter with us. Her husband had to go abroad on business and, for certain reasons, she did not want to go with him, so she has come to be with us. And we're so glad to have her."

"I'm glad, too," declared the man, "it will make a little more freedom for you and Miss Helen, I'm thinking."

Kate's face sobered, as it always sobered when any reference, direct or indirect, was made to the invalidism of the little shut-in mother.

"Yes. Oh, yes, of course. We *can* go more, I suppose." She admitted. "Cousin Polly says we shall. But we mean to see to it, also, that *she* goes some. There are lots of things and places she wants to see. She was here once before, last June, but she didn't stay long."

June!—John Newcomb's face clouded. Would the time ever come when he would not be reminded of that June afternoon at the Art Museum, or, better

yet, would the time ever come when he would not care if he *were* reminded of it! He wondered.

"Where's Tommy to-day?" queried Helen Bennett at this point. "I thought he was coming, too."

"So did I," shrugged Newcomb, "until just before I started. He said he was out to your place yesterday. Perhaps he's fearing that you are getting too much of him."

"Nonsense!" laughed Helen.

"We love to have him out there," declared Kate.

"He didn't stay long, anyway, yesterday," commented Helen. "I promised him a cake with frosting on it; but when I came out to give it to him he had gone."

"A cake, and frosted! And Tommy gone? That's hard to believe," laughed Newcomb.

"It's true, nevertheless," nodded Helen, with a smile.

"He certainly is a funny boy," said John Newcomb.

"He's a very dear boy," declared Kate Bennett emphatically.

And there the subject ended.

That night after John Newcomb reached home Tommy asked a question. It was not about the sail down the harbour, nor about the bathers on the beach, nor yet was it about what they had for picnic supper on the sand, though John Newcomb told him all about these things. Strangely enough Tommy asked:

"Was there anybody went but just you an' the Bennetts an' Mr. Dodge?"

"No."

"Not any lady with greyish hair, an' kind of small, an' not fat?"

"Oh, Mrs. Wheelock—the Bennetts' cousin? So you saw her yesterday, did you? No, she didn't go. She stayed with Mrs. Bennett."

Tommy turned away and began to fumble among some boxes of picture puzzles on a shelf beside the window.

"How long—is she goin' ter stay—that woman?" he asked, casually as if with no particular interest in the answer.

"All winter, I believe. Well! *Tommy!* That was some spill, wasn't it?"

"Yes, sir." Tommy was on his knees picking up the picture puzzles that had fallen with a crash.

"Come, come, my boy, it's time we were in bed."

"Yes, sir," said Tommy, scrambling to his feet. Tommy's face was very sober, and there was a scared look in his eyes.

It was from this Sunday afternoon that John Newcomb found that Tommy, so far as taking up Cora Dean's attention on their picnics and trips, must be counted out. In fact Tommy flatly refused to go at all, even to the Bennetts' house. He would give no reason other than that he did not want to go, and there was always something else that he had much rather do. That was all.

John Newcomb was puzzled and worried, but he was not deceived. There was some reason behind Tommy's stubborn refusal to go to the Bennetts, of course. He was sure enough of that. But what was it? For some days he sifted the matter in his mind; then, suddenly, came what he thought was the explanation.

Tommy had been criticised or chided, and perhaps corrected with a hated "must" or a "mustn't," by either Miss Kate or Miss Helen; and he had re-

sented it. There was no doubt of it. Had he not gone out there by himself just the Saturday afternoon before, and had he not gone away without so much as a good-bye? And there was the frosted cake, too. Tommy must indeed have been angry to leave a promised cake behind him, and a frosted one at that! That was it, of course. Tommy would do just exactly that thing, if he considered his dignity or precious freedom had been assailed.

John Newcomb was more worried than ever now that he was sure he had surmised Tommy's grievance. He liked to have Tommy with the Bennetts. Their quiet influence and gentle companionship was just what the boy needed—and to have the little scamp act like this! It was more than vexing, it really was serious.

Still—and John Newcomb had to admit it to himself—Tommy really was improving fast, and, aside from his persistent refusal to go to the Bennetts with him, he was becoming quite tractable. His manners were better and his language was improving. And, so far as his being with Charlie Merrill was concerned, John Newcomb saw no reason to refuse. Charlie was their landlady's son, a little older than Tommy, well-behaved, sensible and a good-principled boy. Tommy needed the companionship of boys like that, of course. So, perhaps, it was just as well to let him have his own way for awhile.

Anyway, there was no use insisting on the boy's going out to the Bennetts when he didn't want to. It would probably do more harm than good to cross Tommy in his notions now. Besides, school was just about to begin and Tommy very amiably had consented to go, and was even seeming to anticipate it. There was nothing to do, therefore, but to let the

matter take its course. Probably the boy would get over his silly miff, or whatever it was, and soon be going out of his own accord to the Bennetts as of old.

Thus disposing of the matter in his own mind John Newcomb turned his attention to his own affairs. Except for his annoyance over Tommy John Newcomb was very happy these days.

With Grow & Son his relations were exceedingly pleasant. In the Bennett household he was received now almost as one of the family. Kate had promised him that some day, when the little mother was feeling particularly well, he should be taken in to pay his respects to her. Mrs. Bennett had spoken with him a few times already through the window on the porch and he was familiar with her cheery ways and sweet voice; but he had never seen her. He felt that when he did see her he would, indeed, be "one of the family," for he knew that few visitors were admitted to the invalid's room. He thought, too, that it would mean much in his relation to Kate for it would show that she cared for him—a little—and that she wanted her mother to see him. And so, John Newcomb felt that a good deal hung on this promised visit to the little mother's room, and he was hoping it might be soon.

Dodge's engagement to Helen was now announced, and there were no further duties for John Newcomb in that direction,—nor further worries. Harold had returned from his camping trip, and was in High School, his senior year. His studying now was of the kind that only brought good to himself and no longer brought that look of anguish to his sister's face that John Newcomb saw there on that never-to-be-forgotten night in July. John Newcomb's

duties, therefore, in that direction were lighter and his worries fewer though, still, he was careful to be the good friend that boys of seventeen sometimes need.

Meanwhile, to his heart's content, John Newcomb watched Kate. He liked the way she walked, and the way she carried her head. He liked her low voice and her merry laugh. He liked the way she spoke to her mother, as he could hear her in the adjoining room, and her little affectionate deferring to her sister. But he did not like the way she made a slave of herself to her brother, though even that, he acknowledged to himself, was beautiful to see, however exasperating it might be to contemplate.

Harold, certainly, was a torment at times, with his hectoring ways, even now; and none knew better than John Newcomb how dearly he loved to tease his sisters. Never but once, however, had the man seen Kate seriously plagued by his teasing and that was one cool evening when the group were all together about a fire-place in the living-room and the talk had drifted to courtship and marriage. Cora Dean had been singing a little ballad, "Supposing," with the banjo. In the song there had been the man of fame, the man of wealth, and the man with love in his eyes; and each had paid court to the pretty maiden. The maiden had chosen the love, of course, as maidens do—in songs, and it had provoked from Harold the remark, spoken soberly as if after great deliberation:

"Now, if I were a girl, I'd take the man with fame every time. I'd be proud of the fame."

"Oh, no!" Cora Dean commented and, sighing sentimentally, added: "I'd take the man with love in his eyes. All girls would."

"Not much you would! Kate wouldn't, either," retorted Harold mischievously, "*she'd* take the man with money. She said so."

"Harold!" gasped Kate in a horrified voice.

"Well, she did," chuckled the boy, "she said it last night."

"Yes, and why?" questioned Helen's voice, more sharply than Newcomb had ever heard it before. "Why did she say it, Harold?"

There was no answer.

"Then *I* will tell," declared Helen. "You, Harold, had said that you wanted to go to college, and then you wanted to be a governor, a senator, and a president. And what did Kate say then?"

Harold gave a shame-faced laugh, but otherwise gave no answer.

"I'll tell you what she said," resumed Helen. "She said that if *that* was the size of your ambition she would have to hunt up some obliging millionaire and marry him, for she never could earn enough to put you through both college and politics!"

Newcomb had laughed with the others at this, nevertheless he could see that, absurd as it was, it seriously annoyed Kate Bennett; and he was glad that she knew nothing about that embarrassing legacy with its still more embarrassing conditions, otherwise she might have minded the incident even more. He had avoided Dodge's eyes at the time. He did not care to see the quizzical look he knew he would find in them. The event was not mentioned by any of them afterwards.

It was on the last Saturday half-holiday in September that John Newcomb was told by Miss Kate Bennett that the little mother wanted to see him. With an exclamation of joy the man got to his feet.

It was to mean so much to him—that visit, he was sure.

Mrs. Bennett was sitting up in her wheel chair. She smiled to him cordially, and held out a frail white hand.

"I'm so glad to see you face to face," she said as Kate, with a murmured plea that she had something to see to, left them alone together.

"And I'm glad to see you," declared the man fervently.

She asked him many questions—that little mother—about his work, his play, and the countries he had seen, *his* world; and John Newcomb, clear-eyed and gentle-voiced, answered them all in a way that won the little woman's heart quite away from her. Then she began to talk of her room and her treasures—*her* world; and she bade her visitor to go over by the window and look at her children's pictures hanging there.

"You see, I have them always where I can see them and enjoy them," she said. "First come the ones when they were little; then as they grow larger; and then as they look now. Aren't they fine?"

"Indeed they are!" agreed the man, "fine—!" But the word died on his lips with almost a groan, and his hands clinched their fingers until the knuckles showed white. Before his eyes, smiling straight into them, was a little maid in curls and muslin—*his* little maid in curls and muslin.

For a moment he could not speak; then with an effort he loosened his fingers and pointed tremblingly to one and another of the photographs.

"And who is this?" he asked at last, faintly, hoping still in spite of the tightening coil of evidence

that somewhere there was a loophole of escape. He was pointing to the little maid in curls and muslin.

"That? Oh, that is Kate," he heard a proud mother-voice say. "She was almost six when that was taken—and such a little dear!"

"She—she must have been," he heard his own voice falter; and then his hand fell clinched again at his side.

In some way he got out of the room; he was never sure just how. He knew he stammered something that passed for an excuse. He knew, too, that in some way he got through with fifteen minutes more in the living-room with Mrs. Wheelock and the two girls so that his departure might not seem too abrupt. Later, he knew, too, that he reached his room and that he strode at once to his trunk and lifted the lid with impatient hands. And then—after that—there seemed to be a blank, for the little picture that he had taken out, the one of the little maid in curls and muslin and smile, that he held in his hand was the twin—unmistakably the twin—of the one on Mrs. Bennett's wall.

. . . . . .

Which shows that the Ball, which the Fates had so gently pushed onto the long white way, had met with a sudden turn.

CHAPTER XII

With a Sudden Leap and a Bound the Ball Bounces off on a Tangent

ALL Saturday night, and through the dreary hours of a rainy Sunday, John Newcomb tried to bring order out of the chaos of his mind.

Again and again he told himself that it could not be true; that Kate did not send him that photograph. Then, before his eyes, the accusing facts would array themselves: the positiveness of the identity of the photograph; Kate's presence at the Art Museum on the appointed day, her costume exactly as the words on the back of the photograph said it would be; also the memory of what he had thought was her embarrassment when Dodge first took him to call, she probably recognized his name, perhaps even his face, at that time; she had remembered that she had seen him at the Museum, anyway, and perhaps from the very first she had known him in spite of the absence of the beard; and—*had* she dropped that handkerchief purposely?

Indignantly the man would thrust these facts, and suspicions, from him. It was not like Kate. It was impossible that she would seek the acquaintance of a strange man, object: matrimony and money! But—! And again he was around to the same old position on the circle. There was her picture, she was at the Museum on the appointed day —and in the tell-tale white and pink.

With fiendish glee then there danced into John Newcomb's memory Harold's gibe: *"Kate would marry for money; she said she would!"* And though instantly the man rose to the attack and drove the odious thought away with a loyal: "But that was a joke,—Helen explained it all at the time!" yet he knew the dancing imp was not gone but was only lurking in the darker corners of his mind ready to dance out again and taunt him on every opportunity.

Resolutely, but with weakened courage and lessening confidence, John Newcomb would go back to his first position: Kate had not sent the picture—she could not have done it! But, as before, he found himself reasoning again in the same old circle—the two pictures, her presence at the Museum on the appointed day, the white dress and pink rose. Then his questioning suspicions.

Had she then all this time known of the legacy and its condition? Must he believe that she had deliberately sought his acquaintance only to fail at the Museum (unless he counted the dropped handkerchief) but to succeed gloriously by the lucky presentation a week later by Dodge? Was her cordial interest in him, then, all due to—this? He must not believe it. She was so fine in all her ways, so sweet, so free from every sort of look or action that would be characteristic of a girl like that.

For Monday evening there had been planned a visit to one of the moving picture theatres. It had been proposed by Newcomb himself and he knew that he could not avoid going but he had little heart for it just now. He did not want to see Kate—just yet. The thought of being with her while his mind was filled with these suspicions was a torture. This hateful, inexplainable something that had risen and

which was so absurd, really, and so momentous potentially between them must be forever banished. He would be ashamed to look her in the eye with this unjust suspicion in his heart. And the dancing imp would fiendishly taunt: "*Is* it unjust?" He knew he would not want to touch her hand till it was all cleared away. And yet, above and below and throughout it all, was the big ache in his heart for he realised now just how dear to him during these past weeks this winsome, dainty girl had grown to be.

There were six in the party that Monday night. John Newcomb had tried to persuade Tommy to go, too. He had thought that Tommy's presence might help ease the situation, but Tommy, as usual, had declined. Tommy would go anywhere but to the Bennetts. That left the party six in number,—Mrs. Wheelock remaining with Mrs. Bennett. Dodge, as a matter of course, walked by the side of Helen as they left the house. Harold turned to Cora Dean, leaving Kate for Newcomb, which, as Newcomb well knew, had been the usual arrangement ever since Harold's return and a most satisfactory one heretofore but, to-night he chafed under it.

In spite of his efforts to the contrary, John Newcomb was continually studying Kate's every look and gesture in the light of that message on the back of the picture of the little maid in curls and muslin. And he hated himself for it. The frank comradeship of her manner, which had been so charming to him, filled him now with a distrust of which he was heartily ashamed. He tried to talk easily and naturally but he knew he was succeeding only in being morosely silent or flippantly garrulous. Obviously there was no pleasure in an intercourse

of this sort and he was relieved when the belated trolley-car arrived. Obeying an irresistible impulse he manœuvred until with apparent carelessness he was left with Cora Dean to find a seat by themselves. Kate had been put with Harold. Even from where he sat, however, Newcomb found himself watching a gracefully poised, golden-crowned head down the car, and forgetting the bright-eyed little girl at his side, until with resolute determination he summoned all his will-power and turned to Cora Dean with the intention of forgetting everything but her. He succeeded—for the moment.

Cora Dean was good company—when she chose to be, and evidently her choice lay very decidedly in that direction just then, for five minutes had not passed before she had flung at Newcomb's feet a gauntlet of wit that he could not otherwise do than to pick up.

Newcomb was pleased and relieved. He had always liked Cora, he said to himself; and she certainly did not have to be "watched" or "studied." She could be accepted for what she was—a bright, warm-hearted, entertaining little thing; not deep, perhaps, but wonderfully restful. And Newcomb wanted something restful just then.

It was the same during the days that followed. Strive as he would to be his old self with Kate Bennett John Newcomb could not do it. Always he was watching, always questioning within himself—and always continually hating himself that he did do either. To Cora Dean he turned gratefully for relief. Her cheery presence soothed him; her merry sallies gave him something other than Kate to think of. And then there was Tommy. True, Tommy would not yet consent to go to the Bennetts with

him, but in all other ways Tommy was getting to be a real comfort and joy. Tommy, himself, however, was noticing that John Newcomb was strangely restless, unusually silent, and absent-minded these days —and Tommy wondered why.

. . . . . .

And the Ball rolled on, growing big with possibilities.

CHAPTER XIII

Its Erratic Course the Ball Still Pursues

NOVEMBER came. The earth was brown and bare; but to Cora Dean it was abloom with verdure. The sky was gray and sombre; but to Cora Dean it was blue and smiling. The air cut like a knife, and moaned of wind-swept fields and snow-capped mountains; but to Cora Dean it fell like a kiss on her cheek, and whispered of sunny meadows and blossoming flowers. The calendar said it was November; but to Cora Dean's heart it was June. For thus it is apt to be when one is eighteen and in love—and Cora Dean was eighteen and in love. Not that it was the first time; Cora had already fancied herself in love many times before, but this was different—Cora said.

From the very first Cora had liked John Newcomb. Knowing his story, as she did, she saw him always through the haze of romance—and Cora adored romance. She was steeped in love-tales, and saturated with ardent love scenes on screen and stage viewed with palpitating approval from top balcony seats. Always in book and play and moving picture she had wished herself in the shoes of the heroine; and now, before her very eyes, in every-day life, lived and moved a hero.

She was glad John Newcomb was not aware that she knew his secret about the will and about that horrid story setting it all out. For a time she had

not supposed he could not care for *her*. She had been the more sure of it when she had seen how his eyes had followed Kate Bennett, and how, a little later, his feet had followed her, too. Then, just when she was very sure he had succumbed to the alluring charms of her friend, the unexpected had happened and he deliberately sought *her*—Cora Dean.

How well she remembered that evening, and how she loved to dwell upon the memories of it!

From that night all had been different. Instead of seeking Kate Bennett he seemed to actually avoid her. Cora Dean was very sure of it. Sometimes she purposely held herself a little aloof from the others just to see him saunter over to her side to talk with her. All this Cora remembered well. She remembered, too, that one evening she had not gone downstairs though she knew John Newcomb was to be there. She tried to think she had not expected the ringing of her own bell, or his dear voice calling: "May I come up?"

"Why, of course!" she had answered; and he had come.

All this was the beginning; and the end was not yet. Cora sometimes wondered palpitatingly what that end would be. She thought she could tell. The fact that John Newcomb did not know of her being aware of his uncle's will did not trouble her in the least. She declared hotly to herself that she did not love him because of the money—though it would be convenient to have it, of course. As to the little photograph of Kate that she had sent to this man some months ago—she did not care to think of that. And she hoped he had forgotten it. She did not believe he could recognize it as Kate's, anyway; but

when they were old and gray she would tell him how wickedly foolish she had been, and he would forgive her. Until then she had only to dream and bask in the sunshine of this wonderful love that had come to her.

To be sure, she could not say that the love had really come—yet. Thus far not one word of love had passed John Newcomb's lips. But he was nervous and strangely restless; and what could that mean but love? He did not act, perhaps, just as her stage and movie heroes did, but that was because he was diffident. Meanwhile, it was only putting it off—that rapturous moment when he should tell her of his love. And with that to think of, how could a girl be otherwise than content? She could not, certainly, if she were eighteen and in love. And Cora Dean was eighteen—and in love.

November passed, and December arrived. John Newcomb came frequently to the house, but—he climbed the stairs to the Dean apartment. He was more nervous and restless than ever, and he had grown a little thinner and paler. He had, what Cora called, "lovely dark shadows under his eyes," too. (Cora's dearest heroes always had such shadows under their eyes.) He had not yet told her that he loved her, but Cora felt now that the avowal was coming soon—very soon. One evening she thought it *had* come. She had been singing that little ballad, "Supposing," wherein the man of wealth, the man of fame, and the man with love in his eyes, had each paid court to the pretty maiden. It was a strangely favourite song of his and he often called for it.

"And so you would take the man with love in his

eyes," he said this time, half smiling, when she had finished the song.

Cora caught her breath sharply. She knew if she had been one of her heroines of the stage she would have put her hand to her heart, as if to still its throbbing, but being just herself, in a Dorchester apartment-house, she only fingered the keys of the piano, softly,—though even the Dorchester apartment-house could not quite keep the shake out of her voice.

"Why, what made you—you say that?" she faltered. "How do you—know?"

"You told me so. Don't you remember?" answered the man. "Last summer on the porch. You said *you'd* take the man with love in his eyes; that any girl would."

"Oh, yes, I—I remember." Cora's voice was very low. Was it coming—now, she wondered, palpitatingly.

"Yes. That's what you said; and I've wondered since if—if it were true."

This time, even though in the Dorchester apartment-house, Cora Dean did put her hand to her heart.

"Why, of—of course," she stammered.

"That *any* girl would take that—the love?"

Cora dropped her hand to her lap, and picked at a thread in her dress.

"Why, y-yes."

"Harold said he'd take the fame." Newcomb's voice was almost aggressive.

Cora Dean laughed nervously.

"Harold is a boy, not a girl," she retorted.

"Oh, of course," agreed the man, "only—well, you know he was telling that night what Helen—

or was it Kate—said about *her* choosing the—money." He finished with a little laugh that sounded a trifle forced.

"Yes, I remember. It was Kate. But you know Helen explained how that was; that it was only a joke at some of Harold's nonsense. Kate would never have meant it, really," declared Cora, loyally.

"No, of course not," sighed the man abstractedly. "Of course not."

"Of course—not. We—we wouldn't any of us," stammered Cora, her eyes turned away.

Then she waited. According to all rules of romance, as she knew them, the time had come. She had done her part. The man should speak. Furtively she glanced at him. His eyes were moodily fixed on the fire. Evidently John Newcomb did not know the rules at all.

For a long time Cora pondered on this, after the man had gone. Certainly, in some respects, John Newcomb was a remarkable lover. She could not understand him at all.

It was on a Saturday afternoon just before Christmas that Cora Dean began at last to understand. She was sitting with Mrs. Bennett while Helen and Mrs. Wheelock did some holiday shopping. She had noticed ever since she came into the room that Mrs. Bennett's eyes were unusually bright, that her cheeks were strangely red. She seemed restless, too; and Mrs. Bennett was seldom that. Not until after Helen and Mrs. Wheelock were gone, however, did Cora find out what was the matter; then the sick woman, with an evident effort, said nervously:

"Cora, dear, I'm troubled—seriously troubled; and there isn't any one in all the world that I can go to unless it is you. Will you help me?"

"Indeed, I will," declared the girl promptly, though a little wonderingly. "That is—if I can."

"I know," sighed the mother, "of course, maybe even you can't; but I think you can. It's about Kate that I want to talk."

"Kate?"

"Yes. Something is troubling her." With a nervous movement Mrs. Bennett began to beat her hand lightly up and down on the bed. "Oh, if I could only be out, on my feet, somewhere—anywhere, except within these four prison walls, I could see. I know I could see what it was," she finished, her voice breaking.

"Why, Mrs. Bennett. What is it? What—what do you think it is?" stammered Cora.

"That's what I don't know," moaned Mrs. Bennett, more quietly, "and that's why I want you to help me. Kate is unhappy. I know she is. I've seen her sit here thinking, so many times lately, with that hurt, wistful look in her eyes that almost breaks my heart. I asked Helen once, if she had noticed it, but she evaded my question, so I know she has noticed it and doesn't want to speak of it. I couldn't think of any one to ask then but you. You see, all day, and sometimes at night, I just lie here and think and think, and perhaps I have grown morbid, a little, over it; but I just had to ask somebody. Now tell me—hasn't there anything happened, anything among you young people that—that may have made Kate feel badly, someway?"

"Why, I—I don't know. What sort of thing?"

For a moment Mrs. Bennett did not answer. Her head was turned away so that Cora might not see her eyes.

"I—I don't like to say it, even to you," she fal-

tered at last, in a low voice, her eyes still turned away. "But, I have wondered if—if it could have anything to do with—with Mr. Newcomb."

"Mr. Newcomb?"

"Yes." The invalid turned back to Cora, pulled herself half to a sitting posture, and began to talk with feverish haste. "Now, please understand. I wouldn't say a word of this to you—not a word, if—if only I could be out among you all to see things for myself. But I can't—I can't. So, I must use you for eyes, dear. And understand, Cora Dean, nothing else—nothing else could make me say to you what I'm going to say to you now about—Kate. But you know her, and love her, too; and I'm sure you'll understand."

"Why, of—of course, Mrs. Bennett," murmured the girl, paling a little. A vague fear clutching her heart.

With trembling earnestness the sick woman hurried on.

"You know Kate is naturally sunny and bright always; but all summer I have noticed a special happiness seeming to grow on her face until it came to be a kind of luminous joy deep down in her eyes. Oh, I know. I've seen it. I don't have anything to do but to lie here and watch and think. Well, I began to see, after a while, what caused that look. It was always deeper when—when John Newcomb had been here."

The girl at the bedside gave a sudden start, but the sick woman did not notice it. She had fallen back on the bed now, and was talking very fast, her eyes turned away again.

"That worried me a little, for I didn't know just what sort of man this John Newcomb was; but I

questioned Helen, and Herbert Dodge, and Harold, too; and from them all I got only good reports. I saw him once or twice through the window, and I liked his looks. I liked his voice when he spoke. And by and by I fancied it sounded different when he spoke to—to Kate. But I wanted to see him, and I wanted to talk with him myself, and so one day I asked Kate to bring him in. I held my breath and almost cried out then, at the way she looked when she just touched his arm and said 'This is Mr. Newcomb, mother.' I don't think she knew just what her eyes—told. But I did. And—and I saw something in his, too,—I thought."

Mrs. Bennett paused and sighed. Otherwise there was no sound in the little room but the tick of the clock. Cora Dean sat so still she seemed hardly to breathe.

"Well, I liked him," resumed Mrs. Bennett, after a moment. "I liked his big shoulders and his clear eyes, and I liked the way he talked to me. I—I wish I hadn't liked him quite so well; then, maybe, I wouldn't care so much now, for I wouldn't think he was worthy of my Kate, anyway. But—I did like him. And after he was gone, and I had come back to bed, I lay here and dreamed of what might be—like any foolish mother, I suppose."

"Then, after that, seems as if almost at once began the change. I noticed it first in Kate. Her eyes were just as bright, but not in the same way; and her hands had the nervous fluttering about them that they always have when she is troubled about anything. She was very gay, but she was not happy. You know there is a difference. She seemed to think I wouldn't know it, though. But I did. It wasn't long before I began to wonder what was the

matter; and then I tried to watch as well as I could —from here."

"I could hear you all laugh and talk on the porch—but I didn't hear Kate, and I didn't hear John Newcomb speak to her very often, though I heard him speak to the others frequently. I could see different ones of you through the window, too, sometimes, but I didn't once see John Newcomb and Kate sit near each other, though I used to see them that way often—before."

"Later, when it got colder, and you came into the house, Kate began to come in and stay with me evenings and leave you all out there laughing and talking. She had grown very quiet by this time. She was tired, always; too tired even to pretend that she was gay—though once in a while she still had little spurts of acting so."

"I tried to make her go out there with you, but she always shook her head very decidedly, and said she'd rather stay with me. I found out, after a time, that Mr. Newcomb wasn't there very often, anyway; that he didn't come to the house as much as he used to. And—and it's all this that's made me think that perhaps John Newcomb *has* got something to do with it—that perhaps they have quarrelled. *Have* they quarrelled, Cora?"

To Cora Dean it seemed an eternity before she could find her voice and steady it enough to stammer out: "Not—not that I know of. That is, I don't know of—any—quarrel."

The terror at Cora Dean's heart was no longer vague; it was very definite. It had set her limbs to trembling and her heart to beating in great suffocating throbs. It had filled her, too, with a fierce rebellion against Kate, Kate's mother, Kate's any-

thing that threatened to come between herself and John Newcomb.

A bright flush swept to Mrs. Bennett's forehead.

"It isn't that I want *him* or any other man to come here, if he doesn't want to," she cried, with spirit. "It's only that—that I know sometimes silly things—foolish little misunderstandings—come between people who—who care for each other."

"I—know," agreed Cora, in a smothered voice.

Like a caged bird the unhappy girl sat there hopelessly looking for some means of escape. Until Helen and Mrs. Wheelock came home from the city, however, there was nothing for her to do but to stay where she was, at Mrs. Bennett's side. And it seemed impossible for her to bear it. Fiercely she longed to be alone, so she might think. Stubbornly she told herself that there was nothing in this story of Mrs. Bennett's that should really concern her, or make any difference, only that she might pity Kate a little, now that she knew—what she had not known before.

What was there, indeed, that she could do? Surely, it was not her fault that John Newcomb had turned from Kate to her, as he had so undeniably turned. Certainly there was nothing she could do to change that! Neither, if Mrs. Bennett and Kate knew the facts, would they want her to do anything. Of this she was sure. Had not Mrs. Bennett just said that she did not want him or any other man to come there if he did not wish to? Well, evidently John Newcomb did not wish to, else why should he have passed by the Bennetts' door and gone upstairs to hers, Cora Dean's?

"There's one thought that—that keeps coming to me." Mrs. Bennett was speaking, and Cora Dean

tried to collect herself enough to listen. "I'm ashamed of it, but I can't drive it from my head. There's something queer about it, too," she went on, mournfully. "I worry all the time for fear it *is* that, and yet I know very well that if it really *is*, I shouldn't *want* him to come here any more; and I should be glad Kate had escaped him, even though there is, for a time, that hurt, hungry look in her eyes."

The sick woman paused, but Cora said nothing. There was nothing she could think of to say; and perhaps Mrs. Bennett did not expect anything said, for after a moment she picked up the dropped thread of her thought.

"You see, it's just this that I'm thinking of. As I look back at it, the change began at once, almost, after John Newcomb came in to see me; and I—I can't help wondering if—if *I* had anything to do with it—about his staying away. Do you think—I could have?"

"No, indeed. Of course not!" exclaimed the girl, with a flare of her old generous-heartedness. "How could you have?"

"I know; but, still," sighed the invalid, "I *am* a nuisance, you know, and a great burden to—to everybody. And it would be natural, perhaps, that he should think of—of what might come if he did—marry Kate."

"Nonsense!" protested Cora Dean, loyally. "John Newcomb isn't that sort. I know he isn't."

The sick woman brightened visibly.

"I thought so, too; and, as I said before, I kept telling myself all the time that if he *were* that kind, that was all I wanted to know. I didn't want Kate to have him. But I couldn't think he was—indeed

I couldn't. He was so nice to me that day, and listened so patiently while I told him all about myself and the children. He even got up and went to look at their pictures over there by the window, too, and seemed to understand. I remember distinctly that he picked out Kate's—when she was little, with the curls, you know—and asked me who that was—though I think he knew all the time!"

With a half-stifled cry Cora Dean sprang to her feet and crossed the room to the pictures. She had known before—but had forgotten it—that the mate to the photograph she had sent to John Newcomb hung on Mrs. Bennett's wall.

"You mean—this one?" she asked in a shaking voice, pointing to the one John Newcomb had singled out.

"Yes. She was almost six then. I love that picture; and, as I said, he seemed so interested. But he left the room very soon after that, and—and he never came in again."

"And—and he never came in again," echoed Cora Dean, with white lips, her shrinking eyes on the photograph. "He never—came—in—again!"

. . . . . .

And the Ball, brought up short, as against an obstruction, stopped in its tracks.

CHAPTER XIV

The Fates Give the Ball Another Push

IN her own room Cora Dean faced the thing—and Cora was eighteen, and in love. In her own room she fought the battle with the big, black dragon brandishing the flaming sword of wrath, known to most of the world as "Conscience." To Cora Dean, at least, Conscience was a very real dragon—to-day, and now—and very terrible, and he began the battle with a childishly taunting sneer.

"*Now* see what you have done, Cora Dean!"

"But I didn't mean to," shivered Cora Dean in quick defence.

"You've done it just the same, Cora Dean. In that little photograph on the wall John Newcomb has found the counterpart of the one he received. And he thinks Kate sent it."

"Well, he needn't have thought so. He ought to know she—she wouldn't do such a silly thing."

"But listen! How could he help thinking she sent it? Didn't he receive the picture, and didn't she go to the Museum that Saturday afternoon dressed exactly as the picture said she'd be—in white, with a pink rose?"

"Yes. But—well, what of it? What if she did? He didn't see her. He wasn't there."

"How do you know that, Cora Dean? He may have come and gone before you got there, or he may

have been watching from behind some cabinet or statue."

"Oh-h!" shuddered Cora. "I—I never thought of that before."

"And if he did see her, what did he think when he found that picture on the wall, Cora Dean? He thought Kate sent it. He couldn't have helped thinking it, Cora Dean—and you know it. And then how would he feel?"

"Well. What of it? He needn't have made such a fuss, even if he did think she sent it. 'Twasn't a *crime* to send that picture," flared Cora, angrily.

"Maybe not. But who told you how morbid he was about that legacy, and those silly letters and photographs that came through the mail? Who told you, Cora Dean, that he wouldn't even meet a girl if he thought she knew? And who, to-day, told you that after he saw that little photograph on the wall, *just like the one that had come to him,* who told you he had never come into that room again—never again?"

In a crumpled little heap Cora fell into the big chair and sobbed. But the dragon still brandished his sword.

"Now you, Cora Dean, have got to set this thing right."

"No, no. I can't—I can't!"

"But you must, Cora Dean. It's your fault."

"Oh, I didn't mean any harm!"

"The harm was done, though,—and by you, Cora Dean. And you've got to tell."

Cora struggled to her feet.

"I won't tell! He's mine! He—he'll hate me! He's mine, I tell you!"

"*Is*—he?"

Cora winced; but she still held her head high.

"Yes. He turned to me of his own accord. I didn't ask him to. He—he loves me."

"*Does*—he?"

"Of course he does."

"Has he—told you so?"

"N-no; but he's going to."

"Has he ever even looked love out of his eyes to you?"

"N-no. Not when I was watching him."

"Hm-m! And you call that—love?"

"N-no. *I* don't. But—maybe *he* does."

"Hm-m. Well, you can prove *that* easily enough."

"How?"

"Tell him you sent the picture, and see what happens."

"But I can't tell. He'll hate me!"

"He won't—if he loves Kate. He'll bless you for it!"

"I—I don't want to be blessed for it. He—doesn't love Kate, anyway."

"*Doesn't*—he?"

"No."

"Didn't he like to be with her—once? Wasn't he always at her side—at first?"

"Y-yes."

"And what did Mrs. Bennett say about him—and her?"

"But she—she didn't know—sure," choked Cora, collapsing again into the chair.

"No. But *you* do, Cora Dean," declared the dragon, sternly. "You *know* he loves her. You feel it in your heart. Hasn't he grown thin and pale and hollow-eyed? And hasn't he got you to talk of Kate whenever he could? You know he has! But you

think, maybe, if you hold out on this one thing, and don't tell him the truth, that he really will turn to you in the end. Shame! Shame on you, Cora Dean, to want to win a man's heart like that!"

In the chair the slender little figure burrowed deeper and deeper among the cushions as if it desired to shrink quite out of sight.

"All right, go ahead and win him, if you want to. If you like that sort of—*sneaking!*"

Only sobs answered.

"And Kate—poor Kate! What of her? A nice friend you are to her, indeed, Cora Dean. A friend to be proud of!"

Again only sobs answered, until from the chair came a faltering question:

"But if I—I did decide to tell, how—how could I —do it?"

Instantly the flaming sword was sheathed. The dragon looked now more like a father confessor who has to deal with a wayward child.

"Just tell, my dear. Just tell! It's the simplest thing in the world—when you come to think of it."

Very slowly the limp figure in the big chair uncurled and sat up.

"But—how?"

"Then you *will* tell?"

"Y-yes."

"There! That's done with. Now you feel better, I know. Of course you'll tell. I knew you would, all the time, really."

"But—how?" Cora Dean dabbed her eyes with her wet ball of a handkerchief, and looked slowly around the room, resting her gaze finally upon the clock.

"Bless my soul!" cried Conscience, now nothing

but the still small voice he is supposed always to be, "here it is midnight. Now go to bed and sleep. To-morrow—to-morrow you can think—how to tell it."

And obediently, but tearfully, Cora Dean rose and went to bed—but she did not go to sleep. Perhaps, as it was past midnight, she may have thought "to-morrow" was already come. At any rate, she did not go to sleep. She continued to think, and think, until at dawn when sheer exhaustion forced sleep to her eyelids, but even then her problem of—how to tell—was not solved.

She awoke late, unrefreshed, and with that dull, intangible ache that hints of coming tragedy. In a moment she knew what it was, and, with a choking little cry, took up her problem where she had left it. Just how—could—she—tell.

It was Sunday. Outside, a clear blue sky and a snow-white earth told of a beautiful December day; but inside, to Cora Dean, the sky was drear and the earth cheerless. When she opened the window, before leaving her room, the sun-warmed air kissed her cheek as lightly as the touch of a baby's fingers; but to Cora Dean it was as if an icy hand had clutched her heart. Cora Dean was still eighteen, and in love, but June had fled.

John Newcomb was to call that afternoon. Cora Dean knew this, and she knew she should tell him that afternoon. Cora Dean never dallied. Bitter as was the cup held out to her, she was determined to drink it at once. But how should she drink it? Should she sip it daintily, so that one to see her would not realize it was one of despair? Or should she gulp it down in the passionate abandonment of self-sacrifice?

In Cora's mind this telling Newcomb the truth about the picture was a real problem, as well as a cup of despair. Surely she could not bluntly tell him that his suspicions of Kate were unfounded, that it was she, Cora Dean, who had sent him that photograph and wrote that message. Great as she knew his relief would be, even greater would be his anger, she feared, that she should have discovered that he had harboured such suspicions against Kate. She had already mistrusted he was angry at himself because he had harboured them. She wished, too, that she might think of some way of telling him so he would not know that his secret concerning the legacy was known to her; but this seemed almost impossible though the wish was continually in her mind; for at times the thought would come to her that perhaps, after all, it was not Kate for whom he cared but herself, yet this thought she knew was but a blighted hope. Moreover, and Cora winced at the thought, this not telling all did look like deception if—if she should be the one he loved. But the more she thought of it the more sure she was this was the only way she could do it. And so, definitely, she decided that it must be done even though, afterward, a second confession should be necessary.

This much being settled upon she tried to think how should she begin. Thus far duty had borne her up but now— It was a very pale, shaking Cora that answered the ring of the bell. She knew it was Newcomb at the door, and when the tall, good-looking young fellow with kind, frank eyes, came in to the sitting-room, she did not feel any happier, nor was her courage any stronger.

Fortunately—for Cora, who did not like to dally—

a turn in their light talk gave her the opportunity she watched for.

"But I—I do lots of silly things," she retorted in what she hoped was a bantering voice, answering something he said. "You—you don't know me a little bit." She was talking very fast now, and was not looking at him. She had picked up the Bennett cat (which had followed Newcomb upstairs) and was playing with it in her lap. "Only listen while I tell you what I did last summer. It was such a silly thing—such a crazy thing! But I did it only for a joke; for—for a joke, you see."

"What was it? I'm all attention."

Cora Dean swallowed chokingly, and wet her lips.

"I'm not sure I'll tell you, after all," she pouted, teasingly—to throw him off having any possible suspicion of her serious purpose, "you'll be shocked —awfully shocked."

"As if I could,—when I know you and the capabilities of your impetuosity so well!"

The girl bit her lip. For a moment she feared she was going to cry. Then, bravely, she resumed.

"Very well. Here it is. It was last June. Perhaps you may have seen it. A story came out in one of the papers—*The Clarion,* I believe—about a young fellow with sad-looking eyes, and a pointed beard. His picture was in the paper, you know. And this was his story: He had a legacy left him but to gain it he must be married by a certain time." Without looking at him Cora Dean saw the man opposite stiffen in his chair, and she almost felt the piercing gaze of his eyes. But she had made the start and there was no stopping now. "Well, I—I wrote to him."

"You wrote to him!"

The girl winced at the horror in the man's voice. Then, calling to her aid all her courage and will-power, she continued resolutely:

"There, I knew you'd be shocked." She gave a quavering little laugh that sounded suspiciously like a sob. "But, I couldn't help it, really. It was such a good joke! You see, one day I got to talking with Miss Jameson, the funny little woman who keeps a notion store on the corner, and she owned up that she had written to him and showed me the letter. Oh, if you could only have seen it! It was rich—truly it was. And I just couldn't resist the temptation to give the poor fellow something else to think over, only mine—well, mine met with unexpected results," she finished with assumed dolefulness.

"What—do you—mean?"

"Well, *I* sent him a—a photograph."

"A photograph!"

"There! There you go again," complained Cora, tossing her head. "I assure you it wasn't anything so dreadful—not what I meant to do. I didn't send him *my* photograph, of course. I sent him another one I happened to have; a—a little picture of a child." She saw him start and almost leap to his feet, though still she was apparently looking only at the cat in her lap. "Yes, of a child," she went on airily, as if he had spoken, "and that's where the trouble came in. You see, I'd got curious to find out what he looked like—though I wouldn't have had him see *me* for worlds! So I concocted a scheme whereby I thought I could see him—without his seeing me, you know. *But it didn't work.*"

"It—didn't—work?"

Had the story she was telling been anything but a confession, Cora Dean would have laughed out-

right at the man's parrot-like repetition of her words. But Cora was not feeling like laughing just then.

"No. It didn't work; or rather it worked too well. You see, I wrote on the back of the picture and told him to go to a certain place on a certain day, and to look for a girl dressed in white with a pink rose; and I worded it so he'd think that this girl would be the original of the little girl in the picture—grown older, of course. Well, *I* meant to go there myself, dressed in a black dress with perhaps a yellow rose, just to see my fine fellow there hunting for the girl in white with the pink rose; but——"

"Yes. Go on!" John Newcomb's voice was vibrant with excitement.

Cora discerned the excitement and knew its cause, which did not tend to make her task easier. Her chin trembled.

"But—well, by a very curious, but perfectly natural, sequence of circumstances, I discovered when it was too late to stop her that the girl whose picture I had sent had gone to that place on that day —and dressed in white with a pink rose."

"Oh-h-h!" John Newcomb fell back in his chair. Cora could see that his hands were tightly clenched on the chair arms.

"Yes. And wasn't that a pickle for me?" pouted Cora, trying to regain her flippant airiness.

"What did you—do?"

"Went crazy—just about—for a while; then, I told the girl's sister what I'd done, and we did the only thing we could do—under the circumstances—we hurried after the girl so that we might catch her before she got there, if we could. But we weren't soon enough. She'd already got there. We found

her, but he hadn't come; at least, I didn't see him, and I don't believe there were many men there that day with pointed beards but what I saw. There weren't but two, anyway, if I remember rightly, and they weren't anything like the man in the newspaper picture."

"Oh-h-h!" again breathed John Newcomb; and it was almost a cry of relief as if wrenched from him without his consent. Immediately he made a poor attempt at a light laugh.

"Well! Upon my soul," he murmured huskily, "you did have an experience, and no mistake!"

"Yes, didn't I?" quavered the girl, hoping that the thumping of her heart, and the horrible "all gone" feeling, didn't mean that she was going to faint quite away at the man's feet.

There was a moment's pause; then, hesitatingly, John Newcomb asked:

"And did the—girl—the one whose photograph you sent—ever—know?"

"Dear me. I should hope not!" cried Cora. "I don't know what she'd do if she should know. But she'd be very angry, that I'm sure. I hope she never will find out. I—I hope he's destroyed the picture, —that horrid man!"

Cora was looking at the cat, but again she felt the searching scrutiny of John Newcomb's eyes. That what he saw was satisfactory was evident by the man's getting to his feet, and saying:

"I hope he has, Miss Cora, or—will," he added softly, so softly that none but a listening Cora could have heard. "I'm sure I should think about the last thing any one could want would be to have that girl—know," he finished, with a quick indrawing of his breath.

There was a new tone to his voice, a new light in his eyes. There was a new carriage to his shoulders, and a splendid lifting of his head, none of which was unnoticed by the girl whose little body and muscles were held tense with self-control.

He gave a meagre excuse for terminating his call so soon, and she accepted it without comment. When the door had closed behind him, she listened. With suspended breath she followed the descent of his feet on the stairs, the pause in the lower hall, and the faint brr-r-r of the Bennetts' bell. Then, in a little sobbing heap she tumbled into the big chair he had just left, and cried as if her little heart was breaking. For Cora was eighteen, and in love; and when one is eighteen and in love, one does not realise that years—sometimes a very few short years—will bring such happy changes that one will quite forget they were ever eighteen and—*fancied* they were in love.

. . . . . .

And the Fates nodded their heads, and smiled, and looked very wise.

CHAPTER XV

And It's Very Large Now—That Snowball of the Fates

AS it happened, Cora Dean was not the only one that had fought a battle with the dragon, Conscience, that Saturday night and won. Tommy, also, had met the dragon and had come out victor. And so, on this Sunday afternoon, making sure that John Newcomb was headed for Cora Dean's (Newcomb had told Tommy he thought he would run out and call on Miss Dean that afternoon. Would Tommy like to go? But Tommy said: "No, thank you, Uncle John.") Nevertheless, Tommy, after waiting until the man had a good fifteen minutes' start, left the boarding-house and started on the well-remembered, but long-neglected by him, way to the Bennett home in Dorchester. His face was sober and strained looking, and there was a curious mixture of fear, desperation, and courage in his eyes.

For some weeks now Tommy had been disturbed over his Uncle John. Uncle John was not happy. Something was worrying him. He ate almost nothing at times; and many a night Tommy had awakened to see his Uncle John still sitting before the little open fireplace, his eyes moodily fixed on the dying coals.

Uncle John never joked now, and seldom laughed. His hands and feet were given to nervous little jerks

and tappings, and he sighed prodigious sighs at nothing.

Tommy thought at first that it was money. He had lost his job, perhaps. But, no, it was not that. He not only had not lost his job but he had had a "raise" both as to salary and position, as Tommy easily found out by questioning.

So, it was not money. Tommy was glad of that. Tommy himself was in school, and was earning nothing now, so he had been obliged to stop paying his five cents a day for his board and keep. He would have felt very badly to have Uncle John lose *his* job, too. He was glad, therefore, that it was not money.

He thought then that Uncle John might be sick, and he asked him; but Uncle John said no, he was not sick, unless you might say he was sick at heart—which might mean yes, or no. Tommy was not sure.

"Then let's go off, me an' you"; he proposed one day to the man, "maybe we're sick of this old place. I am."

But Uncle John said no, no; indeed, no! He did not *want* to go away. Besides, one couldn't run away from the ache in one's heart, anyway.

So there was an ache in his heart. Tommy had found that much out. And maybe 'twas serious. Probably 'twas; and it meant, of course, that Uncle John was unhappy over something, too. But what was it?

It was about this time that Tommy appealed to Mrs. Merrill.

"Do you think my uncle is sick?" he asked anxiously.

Mrs. Merrill laughed.

"Sick? Sick nothing! Of course he ain't sick, Tommy. Don't he do a full day's work every day?"

"Yes, but—" And Tommy disclosed his fears.

Mrs. Merrill laughed again.

"Ho, Tommy! That's only lovesick—if he's off his feed an' goes moonin' 'round, as you say he does. Probably his best girl has gone back on him. I wouldn't fret over that."

Lovesick! Tommy caught at the word, and thought it over. *"His best girl has gone back on him!"* Tommy wondered that he hadn't thought of that before. He knew now.

It was Miss Kate Bennett, of course. He knew Uncle John had thought a lot of her. Just think of how often he used to go there! And it was Miss Kate, of course. It couldn't have been Miss Helen, *she* was Mr. Dodge's best girl. So it must be Miss Kate. And now Uncle John didn't go to see her much, he went most always to Cora Dean's. Tommy knew he did, from what he had heard him say. So probably Miss Kate, his best girl, *had* gone back on him. Anyway, Cora Dean was not his best girl. Tommy was sure of that, for he had asked Uncle John one day if he was going to marry Cora Dean. And Uncle John had said no, no; no, indeed—never! And he had said it as if he meant it, too. And, besides, one marries one's best girl—most always. So probably 'twas Miss Kate.

Something else then came into Tommy's thoughts —something he hadn't thought of for a long time: the piece in the newspaper with Uncle John's picture and about the will, and the fact that John Newcomb must be married by July next year, or thirty thousand dollars would never be his.

Tommy understood everything now. It was all clear, and, oh, if he could only help!

It was all Miss Kate's fault, of course. She had become angry at something. There was no doubt of it. But perhaps, if she knew—if she knew how necessary it was that Uncle John should get married by next July, she would be willing to make up. If she only knew. If some one would only tell her!

And then it was when Tommy's dragon showed its fiery head above the horizon, and Tommy knew that the fight was on;—for Tommy knew that of all the world he, and he alone, understood just how matters were. *He* knew of the will, *he* knew how unhappy Uncle John was, and *he* knew of the trouble between him and Miss Kate. Therefore, *he* was the only one that could tell Miss Kate all the facts, and explain why she ought to make up with Uncle John.

But Tommy did not want to tell Miss Kate. He did not want to see Miss Kate, for to see Miss Kate he must go to the Bennett house, and nobody but he knew why he didn't want to go to the Bennett house. Tommy knew, though, from the very first of the fight, that he should go because he would just have to go. As if he wouldn't go anywhere—if it was to help Uncle John! So, after all, the fight with the dragon was not a long one, though a tough one while it lasted. And thus, Tommy, with a sober and strained looking face and with desperate courage in his eyes, was setting out alone on this Sunday afternoon for the Bennett home fifteen minutes behind Uncle John.

Tommy's plans were well laid. Uncle John would be upstairs at Cora Dean's and Tommy would go to the Bennetts' downstairs, and see Kate, and get things all fixed up. He was very sure, after he had

told her everything, her stony heart would melt and she would let him go upstairs and bring down Uncle John. Then everything would be all right again, *provided*—and this was a provision that made Tommy tremble with fear—provided that in the meantime he had not seen Miss Kate Bennett's cousin, Mrs. Wheelock, or rather, provided that Mrs. Wheelock had not seen him. Just what would happen if she did see him he could not plan for. He would not back out now, and he would not have another fight with the dragon.

As it happened, Tommy missed his car, and so it was a full half hour after John Newcomb rang the Dean's door-bell that Tommy, white and trembling and tense-lipped, touched his finger to the Bennetts' bell.

Miss Helen came to the door.

"Why, Tommy! Come in," she cried. "What a stranger you are! Where have you been all this time, Tommy?

"Yes'm. Thank you. If you please," stammered the boy. "I've come to see—*can* I see Miss Kate, please?"

"Why, yes. Of course, Tommy!" exclaimed Miss Helen, her surprise plainly showing in her face and voice. "Come in."

And Tommy went in, his eyes sweeping the living-room with one fearful glance.

Miss Kate Bennett sat alone by the window, reading.

A look of great relief, and joy, rushed to the boy's face as he hurried forward.

"Miss Kate, if you'll let me talk—just a minute," he begged.

"Why, Tommy! Is this really you?" cried Miss

Kate, springing to her feet, and holding out a welcoming hand. "Of course you may talk to me as long as you like. But where have you been all this time?"

"Miss Kate, I want——"

But another door had opened, and a new voice was interrupting.

"Kate, I think your mother— *Tommy Wheelock!*" Mrs. Polly Wheelock was standing in the doorway, her face colourless, and her hands outstretched to the casing on either side, steadying herself.

Tommy, his whole self showing utter despair and misery but no surprise, stood twisting his cap in his hands for a moment then drawing a long breath said:

"Yes, it's me. I knew, 'course—'twould come!"

At that moment the hall bell rang again, and again Miss Helen went to the door.

It was John Newcomb.

Immediately, then, everybody began to talk at once. Everybody asked questions which nobody answered; and nobody waited for anybody to finish any sentence.

In the midst of it all was Tommy. He sat down, wretched, angry, frightened, twisting his cap and untwisting it, plainly the storm-centre of it all.

Soon, in some way, Mrs. Polly Wheelock got Tommy off into the dining-room, and there for a long half hour they were alone together. When they came back, Mrs. Wheelock's eyes were red and Tommy's face showed puzzled uncertainty, and embarrassment, but no anger.

A few minutes later Tommy went away with John Newcomb. On their way home, Tommy did

not want to talk of Mrs. Wheelock nor what was said in the dining-room nor why he happened out to the Bennetts that afternoon without telling Uncle John. John Newcomb talked of the weather, the snow on the ground, the Christmas tree to be on the Common, and the prospects of good skating before long, but did not say anything about Cora Dean or about Kate Bennett.

It was not until they had left the trolley-car and were on their walk near home that Tommy said, with an indifference that was plainly forced:

"If you don't mind, Aunt Polly says I can stay with you this winter, an' go home with her next spring."

"That's fine, Tommy." John Newcomb tried to put into his voice just the quantity of non-committal cordiality that the occasion seemed to require.

Tommy glanced up sidewise at John Newcomb's placid countenance, then went on, still airily indifferent.

"Me an' her have fixed it up—a little. I guess there was some things I—I didn't just understand."

"I wouldn't wonder a bit if there were, Tommy." The man spoke casually, pleasantly. "There are quite apt to be some things—a good many things—about which we don't just understand, my boy, as —as I have just been finding out, too," he finished, a sudden odd but very happy expression coming into his face.

"Yes, sir," agreed Tommy, soberly. He hesitated, then he went on with very evident embarrassment. "Mis' Wheelock—Aunt Polly—she—she didn't go with my father. She stayed ter home here in this country, 'cause she thought maybe I might come home, or they'd hear somethin'; an' there wouldn't

either of 'em be here to welcome me. She said she come down here, but she left a family in her house with very special instructions to put a lamp in the window every night, and to let her know the minute they heard anythin'—if they did hear."

"Well, I'm sure, that's good, Tommy."

"Yes, sir. An'—an' they've been huntin' everywhere for me, 'specially in orphan asylums an' Homes an' places like that. An'—an'—well, I guess I'll go back with her in the spring, maybe, an' see if I like," he finished, as they reached their boarding-house door.

It came to Tommy that night, before he went to sleep, that he had not spoken to Miss Kate Bennett of what he went out there to tell her. And for a moment it disturbed him greatly, until it occurred to him that there would be plenty of opportunities to speak to her now, for doubtless he would be going out there again soon, and often, there being nothing left to discover. Besides, so far as speaking to Miss Kate about the matter, perhaps he wouldn't have to now, at all, and of course it would be a lot nicer not to have to tell her about Uncle John unless 'twas necessary. Certainly Uncle John had gone there this afternoon, all right, and he hadn't acted as if there was anything the matter that *he* could see.

It was at this point in his thoughts that Tommy turned over and asked a question.

"Uncle John."

"Yes, Tommy." The voice was a little drowsy.

"Miss Kate Bennett *isn't* mad with you for anything, *is* she?"

"Why, Tommy. What an idea! Certainly not—*I hope!*" The voice was very much awake now. "What put such an idea as that in your head?"

"Nothin', much. I was just thinkin'," mumbled Tommy, turning back again, well content.

. . . . . .

All of which may mean that the Ball is headed for its goal.

CHAPTER XVI

In Which, After All, There's Some Doubt About That Goal

IT was nearly ten o'clock in the evening of what *The Clarion* afterward announced as the "hottest March day for thirty years" that Kate Bennett went to her closet and took out the old, long-suffering spring suit. With a deep sigh she looked with doubtful eyes on the worn seams and napless elbows. Even the new lining, that was "such a splendid match" the summer before, showed now a frayed half-moon of silky threads under the arm and sent Kate with a despairing ejaculation to her piece-bag. In a moment it was in her hand—the little roll of silk pieces wrapped up in the same paper in which she had brought the silk home last June from Mrs. Jameson's store.

There was not much of the silk left, but there was a little, and Kate had just found a piece large enough for her purpose when, with a startled look and cry, she brushed the pieces of silk aside and stared at the pictured face of a man on the crumpled, yellowed newspaper. From that her eyes turned to the name beneath, "Mr. John Newcomb," then to the sprawling headlines:

MARRY HE MUST BY JULY NEXT YEAR

WANTED———A WIFE

GOING————————$30,000

And below came the story. It did not take Kate long to read the story, yet after reading it she still sat motionless staring at the picture. Gradually stern lines came to her mouth, and an angry light came to her eyes. She rose to her feet and, with the paper in her hand, hurried to her sister's half-open door across the hall.

"Helen, may I come in a minute?" she asked, huskily.

"Why, of course," answered a cheery voice; then in an entirely different tone came the distressed: "Why, Kate! What is the matter?"

With a swift movement Kate closed the door behind her, crossed the room and laid before her sister's eyes the pictured face, at the same time carefully covering up the name and staring headlines.

"Who is that?" she asked with suppressed emotion.

Helen frowned.

"Why, I don't know."

"But think! Doesn't it look like—some one?"

"Not that I know of—unless—why, yes, it does look like Mr. Newcomb, now that he's wearing that close-cropped little beard of his."

"Indeed!" murmured Kate, somewhat bitterly. "Well, perhaps it is—Mr. Newcomb." And with that she exposed the name.

"'John Newcomb!'" breathed Helen. "Then it is he!"

"Read!" commanded Kate, with an air of tragedy, spreading out the paper wide before her.

There was a brief silence, then Helen turned, her eyes staring, her lips parted.

"Why, Kate! What in the world—does this—mean?" she faltered.

"It means that your sister is being made a dupe. That's what it means," answered Kate, stonily, though with a smouldering fire in her eyes.

"No, no. I can't believe—that. Where did you get this paper?"

"The silk for my jacket-lining came in it last summer. I got it at Miss Jameson's, you know. She was out of wrapping paper and used this instead. The paper was folded up and tucked away on a shelf behind her chair. I remember now just how she tore off this page and wrapped up the silk for me, apologizing all the while she did it. After fixing my jacket last summer I put the pieces of silk back in this same paper. To think that this thing has been in the house all these months, and I never knew it! I shouldn't have noticed it to-day, probably, if it hadn't been for the picture. He didn't wear a beard when we first saw him, so there was no resemblance even if I had casually noticed the picture. But—he does to-day." Kate's lips closed together in a thin, hard line, though it did not hide their trembling.

Helen turned back to the paper in her hand. Her thoughts were in a turmoil. She was wondering if Kate had found out about the photograph. She was sure, now, that John Newcomb must be the man to whom it was sent. She wondered if he had seen its mate on the wall. And she grew faint at her thoughts of the outcome. And she wondered if Herbert Dodge knew and, if he had known, why hadn't he told them.

"But what does it—mean?" she managed to stammer.

"What I said—that I am being made a dupe, that I'm being tricked. Can't you see?" choked Kate,

trying in vain to steady her voice. "This man—John Newcomb—wants to marry me so he can get that fortune."

Helen almost laughed, so great was her relief. Plainly Kate did not know about the photograph.

"Nonsense!" she comforted soothingly. "John Newcomb isn't paying court to you because he wants to save that thirty thousand dollars. He honestly cares for you. I know he does. I don't understand how all that stuff came to be in the paper, but it isn't like him to put it there. He isn't that kind of a fellow, and you know it, Kate, as well as I do. Look at what he has done for Harold; and for Tommy. Cousin Polly says the change in Tommy is something she can hardly believe. Just think of the way he took that child in and cared for him and was so good to him. John Newcomb is an honourable man, I am sure of it. He isn't using you for a cat's-paw to get that money. He really cares for you."

Kate shook her head. Her eyes turned away. Her lips trembling.

"I—I thought he did—once—myself," she answered in a stifled voice. "But I'm sure now that he—doesn't."

"Why?"

"Because I've been thinking of—of lots of things."

"What things? Tell me, Kate."

There was no answer.

"Kate, dear, please tell me," urged Helen. "I'm just sure they won't look the same at all to me."

With cheeks suddenly pink Kate turned and spoke feverishly.

"Very well, I will tell you—or, rather, I will ask you to tell me—to answer this question. If John

Newcomb cared for *me*—and not merely for getting married so he could have that money—why did he pretend to be my devoted slave for a month, then dance off with Cora Dean for another month, then swing back to me with even greater ardour? Explain that!"

"Why, he—he cared for you the most, of course."

"Did he? Perhaps he did—after he found he couldn't get Cora for his cat's-paw."

"Why, Kate, what do you mean?"

"Simply that I happen to know that Harold asked Cora Dean two or three months ago why she didn't set her cap for John Newcomb. It was an impertinent question and was inexcusable in him, still it was just like Harold. But her answer is very illuminating now. She declared very emphatically —Harold said—that nothing in the world would tempt her to marry John Newcomb, and Harold said she looked so queer and flushed that he'd bet John Newcomb had already asked her to marry him and she had refused. I didn't believe it then—but I do now. It was at about that time that the gentleman came back to me, very devoted and all devotion ever since. It was such an abrupt change that it was very noticeable—to me, at least,—but I thought then that perhaps he had been vexed at me over a fancied something and had found out his mistake and had come back. That was the way I thought then. And I—I will own up that I—I really did think he—cared for—for me, till now."

"And he does care for you," insisted Helen.

Kate stood up suddenly. Her chin was a little higher than usual.

"Oh, yes, he *says* he cares. He even asked me last night to marry him. I promised him my answer

to-morrow, and—and I will give it to him. I am glad," she went on smoothly, "that I have discovered this—in time; very glad. Good-night, dear." And she walked out of the room very calmly, very haughtily.

But later, only a little later, stretched at full length on her bed, she was weeping very wet tears and sobbing very big sobs—for a young woman who was "glad," so "very glad."

Behind her in the other room she had left a very much troubled sister. Helen was very much distressed for Kate, and for the hopes she had so fondly cherished but now so imperiled. She could not believe Newcomb could do such a thing, yet she must admit that the man's attentions had seemed erratic, swerving from Kate to Cora Dean and then back again as Kate had said. But she was more troubled over the matter pertaining to the photograph; she trembled at what might yet come from that. She hoped that Newcomb would never find out whose it was. She did not believe that he could possibly recognise it from Kate's present appearance; and she knew he would never show it to her if he still kept it. She was greatly relieved that Kate herself knew nothing about that incident at the Museum. As things were now it would be disastrous all around if she found that out. And with all these thoughts in her mind Helen rose from her chair and began to prepare for bed.

On Sunday evening John Newcomb came for his answer. His heart leaped with love as Kate entered the room, she looked so adorably beautiful with that deep pink in her cheeks. He had been an ardent lover, and a confident one, since that Sunday after-

noon three months ago when Cora Dean had confessed to him her prank. He was very sure he had read aright the drooping lashes of Kate Bennett's eyes and the quick flushing of Kate Bennett's cheeks at his telling her of his love and his pleading for her to be his wife. True, she had asked for a little time before she gave him her answer, but even then he had been sure the look in her eyes was that of shy happiness, a happiness so new and so strange to her that she was almost afraid of it, but he had not doubted what her answer would be. On his way home the night before, and every minute since, he had dwelt on the bliss that would be his at the moment of Kate's sweet surrender. And so he now approached her with outstretched arms, but—she checked him with an upraised hand and a look that seemed to make his heart stop beating.

"Kate! Why Kate, you don't—you don't mean—" he faltered, his face suddenly white but his arms still outstretched.

"I'm afraid I do mean—no."

For a moment he stared dumbly into her eyes. She stood motionless, plainly self-controlled and unembarrassed. Save for the poise of her head and the flash in her eyes she seemed almost indifferent. His arms slowly dropped to his side but his eyes still sought hers. Could he have heard aright her words? And that look of hers, so apparently unconcerned. He could not understand the change in her in the few short hours since only two evenings before. He did not know that all night and all day she had been lashing herself with the whip of scorn to bring about just this change that so bewildered him.

"But I—I can't believe—it," he stammered at last, scarcely knowing what he was saying.

She turned away—apparently to find a chair, in reality it was to avoid seeing his questioning eyes.

"I'm sorry, but I can't make it any—plainer," she said, "than just 'no.' Won't you sit down?"

He silently, almost helplessly, looked at the chair she touched. His face was drawn and despairing.

"Can—will you tell me why it must be—'no'?" he questioned almost as much with his eyes as with his lips.

"Is that quite necessary?"

"I wish you would tell me," he answered wearily.

Kate moved restlessly now, and tried to look anywhere but into his searching, beseeching eyes. She had not expected the man would take it like this. She had thought he would plead, argue, perhaps angrily remonstrate with her, and for all these she was prepared. But for this still, white misery that so surely was his, and for the grieved and almost reproachful look in the eyes of the man she knew she loved in spite of it all, she was not prepared. With a sudden fear she realized that her self-control was fast leaving her. She groped frenziedly for her whip of scorn but under the spell of his eyes she could not find it.

"I'm sorry if it gives you pain—to tell me," he began again, after a moment, "but it has meant so much to me these last few weeks—what I had hoped—that now, to give it all up like this, I——"

They were luckless words. To Kate they meant but one thing—his fortune which he could not now have her help to gain. Her head came up sharply, her eyes flashed. She had found her whip.

"I can well understand that it must have meant much—to you," she said icily.

He frowned a little and sent a surprised glance

into her eyes at the strange cold words from her lips. She bore the look without flinching. He hesitated before he spoke again—brokenly:

"Must I think that—that it is 'no' because you—you don't care—at all?"

"Yes. That is just what you must think." The answer was prompt and determined. He could not hear the little catch in her breath as the words left her lips, nor did he know the throbbing ache in her heart that followed. But he did see the swift veiling of her eyes that refused to meet his own.

Unexpectedly then he rose from his chair and stood before her. The colour was coming back to his face.

"I don't believe it," he cried with ringing assurance.

"What do you mean?" Kate, too, was on her feet. Then, with a feeble attempt at a smile, she said: "Sit down, Mr. Newcomb. We are getting theatrical—you and I—over a very simple matter. I don't think you quite meant what you just said."

John Newcomb did not sit down. He still stood, half-beseechingly, half-accusingly before her.

"But I did mean it. You do care—or you did, once," he declared. "Something has happened, somewhere, and—I mean to track it—home."

Kate lifted her head a little. She was holding her own now. He was pleading, arguing, remonstrating; and for this she was prepared.

"You are quite mistaken. Things are just as they were before. It is only that now I—I understand them better," she said.

"What things, please?"

Again Kate moved uneasily.

"All things—everything. Really, Mr. Newcomb,

is this quite fair? You asked me for my answer, and I have given it to you. I—I can not marry you."

"Why not?"

She flashed a rebellious glance.

"Must I say again that—that I don't—care for you?"

"No," returned the man with dogged calmness. "I don't accept that—yet." He paused, then went on unsteadily: "Love like mine—that I have for you—could not so fail in reading aright—what it has read in your eyes. There is something else."

Impelled by the depth of emotion in the man's voice, and the consciousness of her love for him in her own heart, Kate felt she was again fast losing her self-control. Recklessly, therefore, she spoke out and said that which she had determined from the first she would not say.

"Very well, then. There *is* something else," she acknowledged with forced calmness. "Marriage—for me—would be impossible without—confidence."

Confidence! To John Newcomb is was a fatal word, so guilty was his own conscience since his shameful lack of confidence in her three months before. Was it possible that she had discovered—that?

"What do you—mean?" he faltered.

With a despairing gesture Kate turned to a little stand near her. She did not see how white the man's face had again grown.

"I didn't mean to show you this—unless I had to," she sighed, as she took out from beneath a book a slightly-yellowed half-sheet of newspaper. "But perhaps, after all, it is just as well. You recognise

this, I suppose?" and she unfolded the paper and held it out, with a man's picture uppermost.

In dumb misery John Newcomb sank into his chair. A dull red flooded his face, then receded leaving it white again even to his lips.

"You do recognise it, I see?" scornfully commented the girl.

"I do."

"Then surely I need not say—more."

"You mean—you know—all?" Before John Newcomb's eyes danced the little picture of the maid in curls and muslin, and in his shamed consciousness loomed up the shadow of his wretched suspicions.

"Everything," averred Kate calmly. Before Kate's vision danced the headlines: "Wanted—A Wife. Going—$30,000," and in her consciousness loomed up the memory of the erratic shifting of this man's attentions from herself to Cora and back again from the unwilling Cora to herself.

There was a long pause, broken at last by the man.

"Will you—let me try to—explain?" he begged.

"Is it necessary—with that?" Kate pointed a scornful finger at the picture. "Will it help regain—the confidence?"

"Good God!" groaned the man. "To think that such a little thing can be such a big one—in results. But, if you would only let me explain."

She shook her head.

"But, think," he pleaded, "if you'd never known—if you'd never discovered—things, it would have been all right."

"Would it? Indeed!" Kate's voice was cold and sarcastic.

"Oh, of course, it wouldn't have changed the fact

that—that I had so wrongly misjudged you. (Kate turned suddenly, her eyes questioning, but the man did not notice. His eyes were fixed on space.) But if you hadn't ever known I recognized the photograph—then, that part wouldn't have troubled you. And, as for myself, God knows I've suffered enough for that."

"You—have—suffered?" Kate's voice was puzzled—hesitating. She had the manner of one who is feeling her way in the dark; but so deeply was the man thinking of his own faithlessness that he did not notice.

"I have, indeed. Even while I was so—so dastardly suspicious of you, I would have died for you willingly. My heart cried out to me continually telling me that you were good and true and lovely, even while my head— Well, you know what my head did—the more shame to it! But it was all because I'd become so morbid on that one subject—that miserable money. And things *did* look—well—queer. You must admit that."

Kate actually blinked.

"Q-queer?" she stammered.

"Yes, very queer. You must see that. You know the whole story—you said you did."

Kate changed her position. There was an odd light in her eyes. Slowly she spoke, as if choosing her words with great care.

"I'm not sure, after all, that I do know—all the story."

"Then let me tell it," begged Newcomb, eagerly. "Let me tell it all, without your saying a word. I don't know, of course, what part you may not know. Perhaps you do know it all. But I want to tell it in my way. Perhaps I can put myself straight—or

at least nearer straight—in your eyes. May I tell it, please?"

Kate hesitated. She *hoped* she hesitated long enough so he would not suspect her growing doubts of her position.

"Yes," she said, "you—may."

And John Newcomb told it—the whole story from the beginning. Twice, near the first, Kate uttered a half-smothered exclamation, and seemed about to interrupt him, but in compliance with his pleading gesture she remained silent. At times his abashed eyes sought the floor, the far corner of the room, anywhere but her face. So he did not see—what otherwise might have surprised him very much—the dumbfounded amazement of the girl's countenance as his story progressed. At its conclusion he faced her squarely.

"And now, I'm done. Heaven knows I haven't spared myself—nor you, I fear. Well—and now?—*now?*"

Kate's cheeks were red and her eyes luminous. There was a new something in her face that set his heart to beating in great uneven throbs, and made his last *"now?"* almost imperative in its passionate appeal.

"And you really feared that I—I was *seeking* you out—for—the money?" she breathed tremulously.

With her clear eyes on his face John Newcomb could not utter the "yes" that absolute truth demanded. But the painful red that flooded the very roots of his hair answered for him.

To his unbounded astonishment she laughed joyously.

"Well, I wasn't! And, anyhow, you don't think so now."

"Then I'm forgiven?"

She nodded happily. There seemed, indeed, behind her every word and gesture a hidden spring of joyousness. She held out both her hands.

"You're forgiven," she said.

He caught the hands eagerly.

"And the answer, Kate, the answer isn't—'no'?"

She hesitated. Her eyes grew soft and dewy; then she gave a shake of her head—the very symbol of "no" itself. Yet to John Newcomb it must have stood for what he wanted, for with a rapturous "Kate—sweetheart!" he drew her close within his arms.

To John Newcomb this sudden surrender did not evidently seem strange—it was but the natural result of his pleadings, so he thought. Had he but known it, however, the real clew to the reason for this surrender was in these few brief sentences that followed a little later:

"And so you wouldn't—if you could help it—become acquainted with a girl who knew about the money?"

"Not after that fool story and picture came out."

"Hm-m, well! If you were so terribly afraid some girl *would* marry you for it, then that is proof positive that—you wouldn't marry the girl—any girl—to—to *get* it yourself, isn't it?" she softly asked.

He did not answer in words, but to Kate his answer must have been exceedingly satisfying, for she asked the question again—just to be answered again.

. . . . . .

And the Fates laughed and clapped their hands—for the Ball had reached the goal.

THE STORY OF A NICKEL

The Story of a Nickel

THE nickel was battered and worn and dingy. So, too, was the man who sat gloomily regarding it. The nickel carried a scar—a small blackened circle like a cipher at the point of the V near the outer rim. The man—the man carried all over him the scar of nothingness and naught, from his unkept hair and unshaven face to his holey socks and unblacked shoes.

That the man was not unconscious of this bond of sympathy between them was very evident. With a shrug, and a cynical smile he picked up the coin from the table in front of him, and held it up before his eyes.

"Well, old chap, you look as if the world had used you about as hard as it has me. Found it a pretty tough old world, didn't you? Well, so did I. And I suppose you were once new and bright and shining, too, same as I was. Oh, yes, I was. You wouldn't think it now, to see me, would you? But I was. Oh, I was going to do great things, when I was a boy. I was going to be a big lawyer, or a big doctor, or a big—well, I had some thoughts of being the President of the United States. And now—I look like it, don't I? I've never been anything big—unless it's maybe a big fool. I suspect I have been that, lots of times. In fact, I suspect I've been a big fool all the way up.

"And now I'm down to you, my last nickel. Well, how about it? Shall I trade you for a sandwich to keep me going a bit longer, so I can apply for that job? Or shall I buy a drink and forget it all—for a minute? You *could* take me to the river. Did you know it? And then—well, then I could forget it all forever—forever! 'Twould be a rest—and I'd like a rest. I haven't had a good sleep since——"

With another shrug, and a long sigh, the man paused in his tirade. Turning the coin about in his fingers, he examined it more closely.

"Odd looking little beggar you are! I had another one once like you, if I remember rightly, with a dinky little ring where some one had tried to punch a hole through it. 1907," he murmured, squinting at the date. "Ten years ago. Gorry, little chap, but you've done some travelling in all those years, I'll warrant. And it hasn't been all honey and pie with you, either, I'll bet you, judging by the looks of you!

"I'd like to know, for the fun of the thing, just where you have been. I'd like to follow you, step by step. Maybe you've been some other poor duffer's last nickel, eh? Was he the one that 'most plugged a hole through you, and then left you to carry this ignominious zero mark the rest of your days? Tough luck, wasn't it—when you really aren't a zero. Why, you're worth five whole cents—you are. You can buy me a sandwich or a drink, or—What did the other chap do? Did he take the river? If you could only speak now, and tell me—and tell me—and tell me—and—tell——"

The words ended in a long sigh. The hand containing the coin fell slowly to the table, and lay there nervelessly. The man's head drooped forward.

Motionless, his eyes half closed, he sat thinking, thinking. He began to nod. Nodding, nodding, his head fell still farther forward, and he slept. And in his sleep he had his wish.

The nickel spoke.

My story? Sure, I'll be glad to tell it. And I just want you to know it's some story, too. The other fellow? Oh, yes, I was his last nickel, too, and he chose— But let me begin at the beginning. And it's glad that I am to be able to tell you that I didn't always look like this, too.

Oh, yes, we've met before. Yes, I was the nickel you had long ago, with the circle mark. I remember you quite well, though you didn't look at all as you do now. I think I've seen you more than once. However, we shall see that as the story progresses.

Very well, then; to begin with.

The first thing I remember was a most painful whack on the head, followed by a very disagreeable pulling and hauling that seemed to wrench me from everything that was familiar and dear to me. I cannot begin to tell you the indignities to which I was then subjected. Suffice it to say that the next few weeks were all a horrid dream of being tumbled and handled about in a manner most humiliating to one accustomed as I was to quiet and repose. The craunching, the grinding, the mingling with all sorts of unpleasant creatures, the fiery heat that left me with no more backbone than that of a jellyfish—it was almost unendurable. Then, as if all this were not enough, there were the horrid iron jaws that seemed to stamp the very life out of me.

But just here came the surprise—and a most gratifying one it was. It seemed that far from

stamping the life out of, it stamped life *into* me. From what appeared to be this living death I emerged a new creature—a beauteous, shining disk of metal with embossed sides—and a name! Henceforth, it seemed, I was to be known as a nickel, short for a five-cent piece.

Dear, dear, but I was proud of myself! And I thought then that I was the only nickel in the world! However, I was soon undeceived on this point; for scarce had I done admiring myself when I was packed off with hundreds of others just like me in a great steel vault.

Dear, dear, but existence was a stupid thing then! For days and days I lay idle and forgotten, until I began to question whether life were really worth the living. Was it for this then that I had been created? Pray, what was the good of being round and fair and shining with sculptured sides, if one were to be shut up forever in the silent dark?

However, just as I had begun to despair of ever seeing the light again, I was packed off once more, and after a long journey I found myself in another but much smaller steel vault. It was a change, but a slight one. But it was very much worth while, for now I began to really live.

First, in a tight compact little roll, with several others just like me, I was passed over the counter of a bank, and carried away in a great leather bag. And to such a place!

Noise! Had I ever complained of being too quiet? Never again, then! I had not dreamed there could be such a deafening racket—click, clack, whang, bang, bing, buz-burr!!!

But my stay was short here. It seemed that I had been taken to a big mill, and that I was to be

put in what was known as the pay roll. Because some man had laboured well he was to be paid *me*. I was to be his reward.

I was very proud. Already I was of consequence, it seemed. So I was very happy, and not at all afraid—only excited—when I found myself thrust into an envelope and sealed up tight. At last I was to begin to live. At last I was to be of some use!

Oh, to be sure, there were others with me in the envelope: several dirty, crumpled bills, and some silver pieces, and one or two nickels like myself—only not nearly so bright. I was by far and away the brightest and most attractive one present, if I do say it and shouldn't.

I knew that a hand clutched us, and that we were being carried somewhere; but scarcely were we out of hearing of that fearful din before a man's dirty fingers tore the envelope open, pawed us over eagerly, picked out one of the coins, and thrust the rest of us into the sort of stuffy, evil-smelling bag that I was ever afterward able to recognize as a pocket. And, by the way, there's just as much difference in pockets as in folks. There's the neat, orderly pocket with nothing but money in it; and the dirty, disorderly pocket with *everything* but money in it. And there's the pocket that smells of— But never mind now. You'll learn more of pockets as I go on—as I did.

Very well, then. In that pocket I was toted from one place to another, and many of my companion coins were hauled out of the pocket to be seen by us no more. As time went on I realized that the man was walking more and more unsteadily, we were so tipped about, and once he fell down and nearly rolled over before he could pick himself up

At last we reached the man's home. And right there and then, that very night, I had my first lesson as to the importance and desirability of myself and my companions; for no sooner had we entered the house than a clamour of voices arose, and every single one was demanding money.

The woman began it.

"Jim, you *didn't* spend any of it to-night, did you?" she begged. "Jim, hand it over, please! You know we need every cent of that money—every cent. There's the rent, and shoes for the twins, and the grocery bill,—and not a thing to eat in the house, and they won't give us anything more till we pay what we owe, and you know it, Jim."

The man never answered her at all, and pretty quick she began again. She was nearer now, and she spoke in a higher key.

"Jim, Jim, you've been drinking! I know you have. You *have* spent it—and here we are *starving!* Oh, how could you do it, how could you do it?" And she began to sob and cry.

We were dragged out then into the light, most of us, though a few still remained in the pocket. I was one of the fortunate ones, however, and I was glad; for I was eager to see what sort of a place I was in, anyhow. Besides, I felt sorry for the woman, and hoped I'd be given to her, to pay the rent and the grocery bill and shoes for the twins.

Oh, yes, I know now that I'm not big enough to do all that. But I didn't know it then. I was young and ambitious, and nothing was too big for me to tackle. Maybe you've felt that way yourself when you were young. It takes us quite a while, sometimes, to learn our limitations.

Well, he hauled us out into sight, and then the

din of voices rose again. There was the woman who begged and teased for every bit of us, in one breath, then scolded and cried because there wasn't more of us. There were two little boys, the twins, yelling for a penny for candy, and there was a very pretty young girl with curly hair and big hungry eyes, who begged of him:

"Daddy, please, just a dime for a new ribbon for to-night. Honest, daddy, I haven't got a thing but an old string, and if I only could have a new ribbon."

And there was a boy, big and noisy, and not at all clean, who was tormenting a kitten, and who kept saying:

"Aw, dad, come on—give us a nickel. Be a good sport, now, come on!"

A nickel! I caught my name instantly, and I quite thrilled with joy at being recognized and wanted. It is pleasant to be wanted, you know. But at the same time I didn't fancy the idea at all of being given to that coarse boy. I much preferred to go to the pretty girl for her ribbon, or to the poor woman for her rent and shoes and grocery bill.

But I soon found that my wants had nothing to do in the matter. Indeed, it was thus early that I learned that even though the real value and purchasing power were ours, and ours alone, we were powerless to extend it without the ministry of some human hand to pass us out.

Fearful as I was, therefore, of being handed over to the boy, I was not entirely unreconciled when the man, after giving nothing to the girl and the children, handed over the bills to the woman, and thrust the rest of us back into his pocket.

There was not a little crying and scolding and

reproaching then; but the man only got very angry, and cuffed the children away. Then he reeled over to an old lounge and lay down.

It was after peace and quiet had been restored that the man began to snore. A bit later he gave a great lurch and turned over, and I found myself, and a dime and a quarter, slipping, slipping, slipping toward the mouth of the pocket. The next instant plump I fell smack on the floor, landing in such a way that I rolled halfway to the middle of the room.

There were a spring and a pounce, and the playful pat of a furry paw. It was the kitten—and he was not content to let me alone until he had batted and rolled me under the stove in the far corner of the room.

And there I lay. It was a most interesting place. I had the whole room before me, and I could see how pitifully mean and shabby it all was, with its bare floor and broken furniture. There was no one present but the kitten and the red-faced man snoring on the lounge. The man was most unpleasant looking. I was glad I was no longer in his pocket, anyway, whatever was to happen to me.

My companions, the dime and the quarter, lay on the floor by the lounge, just where they had fallen. They had not rolled away as I had, so the kitten had not played with them. She saw them now, however, and with a run and a spring pounced on the quarter. She was trying her best to bat it and roll it, as she had me, when the two small boys that had begged for a penny, dashed into the room and saw her.

It was then that I first learned that money was a thing to be fought over. It was a most unpleasant

sight. Both boys pounced on the money, and one boy got it. The other grabbed for it, and in the scrimmage the money fell to the floor at their feet.

How they scratched and bit and tore at each other's hair and eyes then! How they screamed!

"It's mine—it's mine, I tell you. I saw it first!"

"You didn't neither! *I* did. I tell you it's mine."

Just then the pretty girl came in—but she didn't stay pretty; for the minute she saw what the boys were fighting over, she made a dive for it, and she almost got it. There were three of them then, screaming and snarling, and pushing each other—and they didn't see the big boy when he came in.

But he saw them all right, and he saw the money on the floor, too, and he watched his chance. The first thing I knew he had dashed into the fray and snatched up the dime and the quarter from beneath their very feet. With a yell of triumph he held them up, then, away above his head.

"Ah, ha! Ah, ha! *Now* who's got 'em?" he jeered.

With a snarl of rage they all fell upon *him* then, stretching their arms to the uttermost to reach those coins, still held tantalizingly far above their heads. And of them all perhaps the girl was the most frenzied and eager.

At that moment the door opened, and in came the mother.

"Children, children, what are you doing?" she cried, hurrying toward them. "Stop, I tell you, stop!"

Then she saw the coins above the big boy's head, and her voice became even more insistent.

"Bobby, where'd you get that money? Bobby, I say, give that to me instantly!"

But Bobby only laughed and shook his head, and

jeered and taunted her as he had the others in a most disagreeable fashion.

But something was happening on the lounge behind them that they didn't see. I saw it, though.

The man had waked up. Slowly he had been pulling himself up on the lounge till now he sat up, facing them, his feet on the floor. At first he had not seemed to realise at all what the trouble was; but he was realising now all right, and I could see the cunning creeping into his eyes.

I suspected what it meant, so I wasn't a bit surprised to see him leap to his feet, spring toward the boy, and snatch the money from his unsuspecting fingers.

But Bobby was surprised. My, what a yell of rage he gave! It was the old man's turn to laugh now, and he did laugh, long and loud, backing out of the room, and shaking his fist gleefully at the whole crowd of them chasing after him.

Bobby caught him, and they clattered through the door together, banging it after them. The twins followed after more slowly, whining and whimpering. The girl dropped into a chair at the table, flung out her arms, bowed her face in them, and began to cry.

The mother, looking on, so tired and wan and heart-sick, dropped into another chair beside the girl, and patted her heaving shoulders.

"There, there, Rosie. Don't, child! Cryin' don't do no good. And it makes your eyes all red and swelled up, don't you know that, dear?"

The girl jerked up her head, and threw back the hair from her eyes fiercely.

"Of course I know it," she choked hysterically. "But what difference does it make if it does? Who

cares whether my eyes are red or not? What if I ain't pretty? I hain't got anythin' ter make me pretty!"

"There, there, Rosie, dear, don't—please don't," soothed the mother again.

"Well, I hain't, and you know it. I want some pretty clothes like other girls, and I want to go to places. There's the picnic next week—all the girls are goin' but me. But who wants ter take me, lookin' as I do? There won't none of the boys take me anywheres, and you know it, ma. Why, I hain't even got a decent ribbon for my hair. And when I saw that money——"

"Yes, yes, I know—the money," sighed the mother. "If only *I* could give you some! If only your father wouldn't drink it up so! If only we had—the money!"

Money! And I was money. And there in the corner under the stove lay I, longing to come to their rescue, but powerless to so much as roll out into their view.

Oh, yes, I know that I was only a nickel with but a five-cent purchasing power. But I didn't realize then how really small and insignificant I was; and I honestly believed that they had only to find me to be in immediate possession of all they were longing for. Thus absurdly, in our youth, do we overestimate our consequence. You need not smile. Did I not hear you yourself say that you had at one time some thoughts of being President of the United States? Hm-m; I thought so.

Well, to resume.

In the corner I lay, helpless, impatient all that night and the next day, which was Sunday. And as time wore on, even more ardently did I wish to come

out and help, for my heart just ached at the pitiful poverty of that little family. I was really beginning to wonder if I were forever to be doomed to a useless existence under the stove, when on Monday morning I was found—and found by just the one I wanted to have find me.

A broom in the hands of the pretty young girl, Rosie, swept me out from under the stove into the middle of the room; and in a thrice I found myself in her hands.

To be sure I felt a bit chagrined that her quick cry of joy changed to an unmistakably disappointed "Oh, it's only a nickel!" which was a blow to my pride. But still I hoped that my shining bright newness might convince her that I was of *some* value. And I guess it did; for at the sound as of some one coming she hid me very quickly in her apron pocket, and went on sweeping for dear life.

Later she showed me slyly to her mother, and she looked so really happy that my hurt pride was allayed.

"I'm going down to the Five-and-Ten," she told her mother happily. "I know I can find *something* there."

Sometime later, all alone in state, and feeling somehow very important, I took a short journey in a shabby little purse, and found myself in altogether the most wonderful place I had yet seen. The lights, the music, the gay moving throngs, the glitter, the sparkle, the myriad colours filled me with wonder and joy. Especially was I pleased that on all sides I saw my own name—five cents.

I soon learned, of course, that all this meant that one might exchange me for any one of those wondrous articles on display. And what a lot of them

there were! It really seemed as if there were nothing in the world that I couldn't buy—until I saw that quite a number of them were marked "ten cents"—and I had to acknowledge that they were the best things, too. It was no small blow to my pride. It was the first time that I realised that ten cents was worth more than five, and that very likely there was still other money of more value than I. It was not a pleasant lesson to learn. I notice that it is never pleasant to discover that there are others in the world of more consequence than ourselves.

At the very first counter the pretty girl took me from her purse, and after that she held me tight in her hand, or else fingered me hesitatingly, as if she were undecided whether to part with me just then, or not.

Poor little thing! There was such a lot of things she wanted! I could see that. From rings to brooches, from brooches to chains, from chains to ribbons, from ribbons to combs, and from combs to collars she flitted, picking up one after the other, only to look at it longingly, then drop it with a sigh—especially if it happened to be marked ten cents, as, alas, many of them were.

How I wished I could multiply myself into a dozen of me, so that she could have everything she wanted!

Just as I was beginning to think she never would decide, she gave a funny little cry, picked out a piece of bright pink ribbon from a lot of other ribbons in a tray, and said "I'll take that, please." At the same time she handed me to the girl behind the counter, and I found myself whisked into a little compartment with a lot of other nickels just like me—only not nearly so bright.

It was stupid enough there in the dark, I can tell you, after all the interesting things I had been seeing. So I was not at all sorry when I was picked out from the rest and handed over the counter. This time a man took me and thrust me into his pocket. He was young and good-looking, and he carried me off with a swinging stride that made me feel very important. Several times in the next half hour I thought I was going to leave him, though, for he pulled me out of his pocket every few minutes along with the other money; and his great fingers poked us over in his hand and picked out dimes and quarters and pennies and other nickels, as well as bills. But he didn't take me—though he did get hold of me once, and I thought I was a goner, for sure.

He went into several stores and bought lots of things: a new hat, a pair of shoes, a handkerchief, and a wonderful red necktie. But he never spent me at all, and he took me home with him to a tiny little back room up four flights. It was a mean little room with a bed, a bureau, and two chairs, and one window that looked out on roofs and chimneys.

But the young man wasn't paying attention to his room. As soon as we got in he pulled all us money from his pockets and counted us carefully. Then he put down some figures in a little book he had taken from another pocket, and left us all on the bureau while he undid the bundles he had brought in with him. His eyes sparkled and he began to whistle. He put on the shoes, and the necktie,—taking an hour 'most to tie it,—brushed his coat vigorously, and tucked the handkerchief into his pocket with the corner showing. Before the little cracked mirror in the bureau he put on his hat, tipping it first one

way and then another. A minute later he had swept us money into his trousers pocket and hurried out of the room, whistling merrily, and jumping downstairs two steps at a time.

By and by I heard gay voices and laughter, and the music of a band. Then suddenly, right close to me I heard a voice I knew I recognized—the voice of Rosie, the pretty girl who had bought the bright pink ribbon. But she wasn't crying or fretting or whining now. She was chatting and laughing and giggling, and having the best time possible. I heard him tell her she was looking fine with that ribbon-band around her head; and he asked her if she wouldn't go to the factory picnic with him next Saturday.

I was so glad for that, for I knew how she wanted to go to that picnic. But what do you suppose that little minx did then? I was just listening for her exclamation of joyful acceptance—for hadn't I heard her tell her mother how she was just dying to be taken to that picnic?—when she coolly says, and actually hesitating, too, "Why, I don't know, Joe. *Perhaps* I could. Why, yes, thank you, I guess I will."

Dear me, but I was one surprised nickel! I was just beginning to think I had made a mistake, and that it wasn't the pretty girl at all that I knew, when suddenly the man thrust his hand into his pocket and pulled me out with some other coins, and I saw that it *was* the same girl, after all. The pink ribbon was around her head now, with a perky bow just over one ear. And it did look stunning, I'll own. I felt mighty proud of myself to think I had bought it for her.

"Say we have a glass of soda on it, then, eh?" proposed the young fellow.

The next thing I knew he had tossed me and another nickel on to the counter of a store he had just entered; and for several minutes we lay there while the man behind the counter was mixing the drinks, and joking and laughing with the pretty girl and her beau.

My, but it was a gay place! All lights and mirrors, and sparkling bottles, red, and green, and orange. Jolly young couples, like Joe and Rosie, were eating ice cream and drinking soda, giggling and chatting, and clapping their hands at the music of the band in the square outside.

Across the room, though, I saw those who were not so jolly. There was another counter there, with shelves above shelves of sombre brown and black bottles behind it. There were no laughing boys and giggling girls there, no ice cream, no fizzing drinks. Pale-looking women and sick-looking men hurried in, and talked anxiously to the man behind the counter. Before I had had a chance to see much more, however, the joking young man behind my counter swept us two nickels into a drawer, and I found myself once more sorted in with other nickels of my kind in a little round compartment.

But not for long. Almost immediately I was slipped out over the counter again, and into the hand of a tall, black-eyed man with a big diamond in his shirt-front, and another on his finger. The man thrust me into a great big pocket that was dirty and smelt of tobacco, though there wasn't any tobacco there.

I didn't like his pocket a bit, even if there was quite a lot of money there; and very soon I found

that I didn't like him, either. He went out into the street, where the band was playing, and stood around on the corners and tried to pick up acquaintance with half a dozen different girls.

Some of the girls he spoke to seemed frightened, and would not answer him at all, but just shied off hurriedly, as I could tell by the way he jeered after them.

"Ho, what you 'fraid of? I won't hurt you!"

One girl giggled, and didn't say anything, and another jollied him back good. But when he attempted to take hold of her arm she just laughed, "Oh, no you don't, sir!" and ran off.

Then there was a girl that turned and faced him, and demanded to know what in the world he meant by trying to scrape the acquaintance of a respectable young woman like her.

"And just let me tell you right now," she went on indignantly, "if you say another word to me I'll call the police!"

The man gave a disagreeable laugh, and said a bad word under his breath. Then he turned and strolled away; and pretty quick I heard him say:

"I beg your pardon, Miss, but didn't you drop this handkerchief?"

"Oh, no, sir, thank you. That isn't mine at all, sir," answered a girl's voice. And at the sound of it I felt as if I wanted to jump right out of the pocket, for it was the voice of Rosie.

I wanted to warn her to have nothing to do with this bold, bad fellow; but of course I knew I could not do that. Already I had learned that whatever usefulness I possessed was a passive usefulness, dependent every time on some agent quite outside of myself. I did wonder, though, where the handsome

Joe was, and why she was alone. For I knew she must be alone, or the black-eyed man would never have spoken to her. I suspected, too, that it was his handkerchief he was asking her if she had not dropped. For already I had heard him ask that same question of three other girls, and it wasn't likely that four young women had dropped a handkerchief in that one short half hour!

"Pleasant evening, isn't it?" said the man then, in his politest voice.

"Y-yes, sir."

"Quite a town you have here, Miss."

"Oh, do you think so?"

Rosie was pleased as Punch to have him talking to her. I could see that. And so was the black-eyed man, as he showed very plainly.

"Sure," he said, patronizingly. "Oh, of course it isn't Boston, exactly!"

"Oh, do you know Boston?" cried Rosie; and I could tell by her voice that she had sidled up real near to him in her eagerness.

"Well, I should say! I live there," he boasted.

"Oh, my, how perfectly grand!" breathed Rosie. "What wouldn't I give if I could say that!"

"Well, why don't you? What's to hinder?"

"Oh, do you think I could, really, sir? Do you s'pose there's anything a girl like me could do there? I'd be willing to work real hard. Why, I'd be willing to work my fingers off, 'most, just for the sake of being there. I'm goin' there some day, too. You see if I don't!"

"Good! Now I like a girl with some spunk," he cried, admiringly. "Of course you can do it! The idea—a smart, pretty girl like you, shut up all your life in a town like this!"

"That's just what I think. Oh, I don't mean, of course, about the smart and pretty part," she laughed embarrassedly. And I knew she was blushing, and looking prettier than ever just because she *was* blushing. "But it seems as if I'd just got to go to Boston. Say, could I get a job there, do you think?"

"Sure you could! Now, look-a here, I'm going back myself to-morrow morning. I'll take you down with me. What do you say. Come on!"

"Oh, no, sir, I couldn't do that—not yet." Rosie answered with prompt decision, but she sighed regretfully, as she added: "Oh, how I wish I could! But I'm going ter go—sometime!"

"Then, listen. Look-a here, you just write to me when you do come, will you?—and *I'll* see that you get a job all right," declared the man. "My name's Harry Lenox. Here, I'll write it down for you," he suggested, fumbling in his pockets for a pencil. "There, now, I've written it down on the back of this card, and my address. Now, don't you forget. When you get ready to come to Boston, you just write to Harry Lenox. Now, will you?"

"Oh, yes, sir. Thank you, sir, so much!" breathed Rosie. "Say, but that's awful good of you! I want to go more than ever now."

"Of course you do! And you'll go, too. You ain't the namby-pamby kind that gives up—I can see that. Now come on in, let's have a glass of ice-cream soda on it, eh? My treat."

"Oh, I'm so sorry, but I couldn't do that, either," cried the girl regretfully.

"Well, I like that!" retorted the man in a voice that showed he did not like it at all.

"Oh, please, don't think that I don't appreciate all

you've done for me," begged the girl, plainly very much distressed. "And after your giving me that card and all, and you such a fine gentleman, and me a poor girl. But, you see, I—I told my friend I'd wait here, and I expect him back every minute. Oh, he isn't like you, of course, but he's a real nice fellow, and he's been awfully good to me, and—and here he is right now."

"Oh, of course—excuse *me*. If that's it, I'll take myself off," said the black-eyed man, rather disagreeably.

I had just time to hear Joe say a bit sharply: "Who's yer friend, Rosie?" when the black-eyed man carried me so far away I couldn't hear anything more.

But I didn't mind so much, for I didn't like to have Rosie with him one bit. I was just glad that Joe came back when he did.

To be sure, I didn't particularly enjoy being carried around in this Harry Lenox's big smelly pocket, and I couldn't help wondering if he'd spend me before he left town, or if he'd take me to Boston with him the next morning. I rather liked the sound of Boston. It promised interest, and perhaps adventure. But just as I was wondering what it *would* be like, the man pulled me out of his pocket, together with some other coins, holding us for a minute in his open hand, while he selected which of us he wanted to use.

We were in another big room with lights and laughter and bottles, and a long counter. But it was all men, this time, most of them red-faced and blear-eyed, and everything smelt strongly of whiskey and tobacco. I was soon jingling on the counter,

only to find myself the next moment in the now familiar nickel compartment of a cash drawer.

It was a long time before I was taken out this time; and I had just begun to despair of ever having any more adventures, when the barkeeper's fat fingers plucked me out from the rest and threw me down before the worst-looking old vagabond I ever saw.

His hat was a little more than a ragged rim about his head, his shoes but little more than a ragged rim about his feet. His patched and tattered trousers hung from one shoulder, and his flapping coat hung loosely on his gaunt frame.

With what seemed to be a single gulp he swallowed his drink, picked me up and tossed me into the air, catching me deftly just as I thought I was surely going to the floor.

"Well, so long. I'll be off, lest some of you knife me for my pile," he chuckled, tossing me into the air again, then dropping me into one of his pockets, after a very obvious search among his rags for one without a hole in it.

Down the street he went, with a long, free stride, humming a gay little song. In spite of his rags and tatters I suddenly felt elated and exhilarated. We had gone some distance when he dropped himself down by the side of the road and took me from his pocket.

We were just outside of the town, where the houses were few and far between. With a funny little chuckle he tossed me into the air again. Then he began to talk to me, just as you did a short time ago —though he didn't say the same things at all.

"Well, little pardner," he began jovially, "where shall we get our dinner, across the road at the big

yellow house, or down there in the white one on this side, eh? Which looks the best and the juiciest? We'll toss up and let you settle it for us—but let me warn you, sir. There's no tellin' by the looks of the front door how the back'll be. Many's the wide, invitin' front door that's been tight shut when it came to its back; and many's the shabby little paintless front door that had a wide-open, generous back door, good for a feast fit for a king. So don't be lettin' the fine house across the way be foolin' you. Here goes, then, heads up—and the yellow house it is!" And he tossed me in the air again, letting me fall this time to the ground at his feet.

"Heads!" he cried a second later. "All right, here goes it. I'm game, and I'll follow your lead. I admire your spunk—but I don't your judgment. However, we'll see." And he picked me up, put me in his pocket, and started across the road for the big yellow house.

How I hoped he'd win! It was the first time I had ever been asked to settle a question (though I was to have the experience many times afterward), and I was naturally very excited over the outcome.

A minute later I heard him asking very politely for just a bite to eat.

He didn't get it. Indeed, he didn't get it until he had asked at the doors of two more houses, so the white house didn't give it to him, either. I was glad of that. Someway it made my choice of the yellow house a little easier to bear.

Well, all that day I stayed with him, and all day he talked to me and called me little pardner. It was he who marked me with this little circle scar. After dinner, as we sat resting under a tree, he took a sharp something from his pocket and pounded it

against me with a stone. When he had finished, there was the little circle cut half through.

"There—now you're mine"—he chuckled. "I've put my mark upon you." All day, too, he made me decide everything for him. It was a great responsibility, of course. But he did it so gaily, and was such good company, that I enjoyed it immensely. Every cross-road we came to he tossed me up to see which way to go; and he did the same for his supper —to know which house to ask, I mean.

I wondered why he did not offer me in payment; but he never did. But he paid for it, all right. At each house, where he was fed, he gathered the children around him, and sang songs and danced till he had the whole house looking on and laughing. For that matter, he was always doing something for a child, soothing a bumped forehead, or chasing away tears with his antics. What a jolly good fellow he was, and how I hated to leave him! And the way I left (or rather he left *me*) was the worst part of it.

It had grown almost dark. There were two barns in sight, and he tossed me up to see which he should go to, to sleep. He had tossed me higher than usual, and when I fell I struck a small stone and bounded some distance away into the grass.

How he did hunt for me, and how I did wish I could speak and tell him where I was! But I couldn't say a word. Never, until now, have I been able to talk. Perhaps that's why I'm doing such a lot of talking now!

Well, he hunted and hunted, peering into the grass, and talking to me, half in earnest, half in fun, calling me his little pardner and saying I was the only thing he had in the world to love.

He was just getting pretty near to where I was,

and I was just beginning to crow inside of me that he had found me, when a cross old farmer came out of the house near by and told him to be off about his business, and be mighty quick about it, too, or he'd telephone for the sheriff; and that whatever he was looking for in the grass he couldn't have, if he found it, for it belonged to *him.*

With a shrug and a sniff, and a funny throwing up of his hands, my jolly friend called a soft "good-bye, little pardner—I'll be darned if I'll find you for him! So long!" And he went off down the road, whistling cheerily.

When he had gone the old farmer came and peered into the grass near me; but he didn't see me—for which I was devoutly thankful—and pretty soon he turned with a grunt and went back into the house.

And I was alone.

The stars came out one by one, and the moon rose. Men and boys passed me by, but they did not see me. Automobiles with their glaring lights whizzed by, and a young couple with their arms around each other sat down close by my side and gazed at the moon between their love-making, but *they* didn't see me, either.

All night I lay there. Then very early in the morning I heard a whirring swish of wings, and a great bird circled round and round me, then swooped down and picked me up, and carried me back toward the town I had left that morning.

Up, up, up I sailed, 'till the farmhouse seemed a mere speck behind me. Another swoop—and I was deposited in a nest where I found several bits of bright glass and a small piece of shining tin. It

was a curious place, high up in a great tree by the side of a grass-grown road through the woods.

"Surely this is the end of me," I thought, "for never, never can I escape from such a place as this."

That only shows how little we know what's in store for us! Oh, well, perhaps it's just as well we don't!

It must have been weeks that I was up in that nest. Then, just as I was sure I should never reach the earth again, a terrific shower arose. The lightning ripped and tore through the trees, and the thunder crashed straight over our heads. The great tree rocked and swayed, and the birds screeched in terror. There came a blinding flash, a deafening roar, and the sharp splitting of rent wood. The next instant one half of our tree—the half containing the nest—crashed to the ground, and I found myself tossed into the dirt of the roadway, forty feet away.

It was a lonely place, and there was but little passing. A boy went by, stood and stared at the splintered tree, then passed on, looking back a bit fearsomely over his shoulder.

A man with a gun came along, and he paused to stare; and two boys hunting woodchucks stopped and chattered noisily. But none of them saw me.

The next day I heard a voice that I knew—the pretty girl's, Rosie of the pink ribbon. I knew then, what I had suspected before—that the bird had carried me back to near the town where Rosie lived.

To-day the girl had her two small brothers with her. They all carried pails half full of berries.

Oh, how I did wish she'd see me! I wanted to buy her another pink ribbon for her hair, or something else that she wanted. It seemed as if she just couldn't help seeing me. But they only stopped

a minute to look at the tree, then hurried along—and Rosie's little foot trod square upon me as she passed.

The pity of it! It was a pity, wasn't it, when I so wanted to help her!

For two days I lay there in the dirt, then an old man came hobbling along the road, his eyes on the ground. He was bent, shabby, and old. He was as disreputable-looking as my jolly friend of a few weeks before, but I didn't like him at all. I didn't like his little peering eyes, nor the way he hugged his coat around him. Tired as I was of staying alone in the dirt, I was actually sorry when I saw his little peering eyes light on me. Nor did I feel any more reconciled when he gave a little grunt of joy, and reached out his bony fingers to pick me up.

As I said, I wasn't pleased at all—yet never had any one (not even Rosie) seemed so glad to see me. He laughed and gurgled and grunted, and actually patted me with his long yellow fingers; and he kept such a tight hold on me that I felt actually almost suffocated.

Still, when I saw what a mean little house he lived in, and how poor and shabby everything was, I felt ashamed of myself; and I sternly told myself that I ought to be thankful that some one had found me who really needed me—one to whom I could really do some good.

The poor man ate nothing for supper but some old dry bread he took from a cupboard. I wondered why he didn't take me out at once and spend me for something to eat—especially as every few minutes he would come to look at me, as if to make sure I was where he had put me.

I was really beginning to feel just awfully sorry

for the poor old creature, when a very curious thing happened. As soon as it was dark, he shut all the doors and windows of the shabby little house, pulled down the shades very carefully everywhere, and lighted a lamp. Then, first making sure that everything was tight and fast, he got down on his hands and knees, pulled up a loose board under the bed, and took out three great boxes. They were heavy, I knew, by the way he carried them. He put them on the table, one after another. Then before he opened them he went to all the doors and windows to make sure that no one could get in. He came and got me then, and put me down on the table. Next he opened the boxes. And, what do you think—every single one of those boxes was full of—money! one full of bills, the other two of coins—gold, silver, nickel, copper. There were all kinds there.

Very lovingly then the man took the money out on the table, stacking it up in little piles, patting it, talking to it, and gloating over it.

I was mad then. Of course I wasn't sorry for him one bit longer. With all that money to spend, if he wanted to be foolish enough to go ragged and cold and hungry, he had only himself to thank for it. He added me to one of the piles; then, after a lot more of gloating over us, he put us away again.

Night after night he did this. Night after night he took us out on that table, stacked us in little piles, and patted us and talked to us. Sometimes he had a little money to add to us; and one night he brought home a great roll of bills. It was that night that something happened—and right glad I was that something did happen, for I was certainly tired of my present stupid existence, I can tell you.

Well, that night, just as he was counting over the

new roll of bills, and we were all spread out on the table, there came the most awful noise I ever heard. Two windows and a door burst open, and three masked men dashed into the room.

With a snarl of rage the man with the money sprang to his feet and reached for his hip pocket. But the three men were too quick for him. In a trice they had his hands bound, his feet bound, and a gag in his mouth. Then they took away the pistol he had in his pocket and flung him into a chair.

They didn't kill him. They said they didn't want to kill him; that it would be worse than death for him to see his money leaving him forever. Then they sat around the table and divided the money, jeering at the old man every few minutes and holding out the money to him. I fell to the lot of a short, black-haired fellow with piercing dark eyes gleaming through his mask. The little pile of nickels was the last to be divided.

The three men jeered some more, then each with a low bow and his hand mockingly on his heart, went out of the door leaving the old man alone.

Of course I don't know what he did then, for I came away with the short, black-haired robber; but I don't see how he could have done much of anything, tied hand and foot and mouth as he was.

My new owner and the other two men skulked behind the bushes just as soon as they left the old miser's home, and once I thought, from what they said, that they came mighty near being caught. At the cross-roads they separated, each going a different way.

My own robber took the road to town, and I guess he made for the first saloon that he saw. Anyway, it wasn't very long before I smelt the familiar

odor of whiskey once more, and I was not surprised to be handed out on to the counter to pay for a drink. And of course then I soon found myself in the cash drawer again.

I didn't worry so much this time for fear I wouldn't ever get out. I was very confident that sooner or later I should be passed out in change. So now I just spent my time wondering and guessing as to where I was to go next.

But you'd never guess where I *did* go! Straight into the pocket of Rosie's father. Yes, I did! And, you see, after all, it was perfectly natural that I should, for he came in for a drink, and I was handed out to him in change. So I was taken back to the place where my first real adventures began.

But oh, what a different house it was!

The little mother had died, and Rosie was trying to keep house for her father and the little boys. Bobby, the big boy, had run away, and I saw right off that Rosie was having a hard time of it. I didn't know all these things at first, of course, but I found them out very soon, in one way and another.

That very first night her father came home drunk, as he had before, and I heard Rosie begging him for money to buy something to eat. And he refused, just as he had before. He tumbled on to the lounge, just as he had before, too, and went to sleep, only this time I didn't roll out of his pocket, though I'll own up I tried to. But I had long since learned that I am utterly powerless to do anything of my own will. That is why I should think they'd stop blaming the money when a rich young man goes to the bad. It isn't the money's fault—but the way it is spent.

Well, to go back to my story. Just then the little

boys came in and began to whine and tease for their supper. They picked on each other, too, till they had a nice little quarrel going, when there came a knock at the door, and two ladies came in.

I did not like them a bit. I didn't like their voices, and I didn't like the way they nosed around the room. I knew they were doing it, even shut up as I was in that pocket, and I just hated them for it, for I could see it bothered Rosie. Though I suppose they were kind and meant well; but they were so hateful and patronizing that I didn't blame Rosie for doing what she did do—afterwards.

Well, the ladies said they had heard about the shocking conditions there, and they had come to see about it. They said they should take the boys away at once with them and put them into a Home; that this was no fit place to bring up children in. And you'd think by the way they said it that poor Rosie was to blame because her father was lying on that lounge beastly drunk! And just then he snored, too, dreadfully.

They asked Rosie how old she was, and when she said sixteen, they said "Oh!" and "Ah!" in a very disagreeable way, and declared that something must be done with her, too.

Rosie got mad then, and said things; and they weren't real polite and pretty things, either. But she was worn out and frightened and hungry; and she was in just that frame of mind that she could have been turned either way. If they'd shown the least little bit of sympathy and loving interest, she'd have been crying on their shoulders, I know; but under their hateful supercilious ways she just got mad and spoke her mind.

They were properly shocked, of course, and they

pulled the little boys severely to their side, and said that they'd see what could be done; but, for their part, they thought she ought to be sent to the Reform School. Then they flounced out each leading one of the little boys.

Poor little Rosie! She just tumbled down in a heap after they'd gone, and had a good cry. And all the while her father still lay on the lounge and snored.

After a while she stopped crying, and I couldn't hear anything. Then I heard her softly creeping over to the lounge. The next minute her warm moist little fingers clutched me and all the rest of us money in the pocket and pulled us out.

I could see then how red and swollen her poor little face was, and I could have cried with her.

The old man did not stir, and she put me and the other money very softly on to the table, then she went and tried the other pockets. She took out all the money there was; then, after standing there looking at her father for quite a while, she picked out one of the bills, and slipped it back into his pocket. Then she carried all the rest of us into her own little bedroom out of the kitchen.

With a little sobbing cry she opened a small box in her bureau drawer, and took out a card with a name written on it. Then she rummaged round the room till she'd found a pencil, a piece of paper, and a dirty envelope. It took her a long time to write the letter, though I could see that the letter itself was short. Then she found a stamp, and after a peep at her father, she went out with it.

When she came back her cheeks were pink, and her eyes very bright. But she began to sob again as she pulled an old black bag out from under the

bed, and began to pack it with the few shabby little things she took from her bureau drawers and the nails behind the door. Some of the things were so pitifully worn and old that she had to throw them to one side, after a rueful examination; and none of the things were very good. Then she began to change her dress, and all the while she kept up a moaning little talk to herself.

"Maybe they think I will stay here to be sent to a Reform School. Maybe they do! Oh, mother, mother, if you'd only stayed here with—with me." She had found a little tintype of her mother, and was kissing it and crying over it, and talking to it. "*You* wouldn't want me to stay, would you, with you gone, and Bobby gone, and the boys gone. *You* wouldn't want me to be sent to any old Reform School! Of course you wouldn't!" With feverish haste she fell to packing again.

"And I'm not going to, either. I'm going to Boston. There's nobody here. Even father doesn't—care. I can get something to do there, I know I can. And that good, kind Mr. Harry Lenox will help me. I know he will."

Taking out the card she studied it again, long and thoughtfully, then she tucked that into the bag, too, with the rest of her things. From time to time she ran to the window to look out, peering up into the sky, impatient for the morning. Sometimes she fell into a fitful doze, her head on the black bag on the table by her bed. As the first faint streaks of dawn came in at the window she hurriedly did the last few things and put on her hat and coat. When she was all ready she put in the money, and shut the bag. I think she went in to look at her father, for I heard her whisper a soft good-bye, with a sob

in it. Then she crept softly from the house and went out into the street.

It was a long walk to the station, and I know she must have been tired when she reached it. I heard her ask for a ticket to Boston, and I know she gasped a little at the price. But she took out her money to pay for it, and oh, I was so afraid she'd take me to help pay, and I didn't want her to one bit. I wanted to stay with her and see what happened to her.

That's the trouble with a life like mine. We get so interested in the people we're with we want to stay with them right along. Still, I knew if she didn't pay me out for something, I'd never do her any good. And so there you are! But I wanted to stay long enough to get her all well located in Boston. I never had liked the looks of that black-eyed man, and I was sorry she had written that letter to him. Somehow I wanted to stay by. I thought maybe I could do some good, somehow. Anyway I wanted to stay. So I was particularly glad when she picked out a bill and put me back in her pocket.

She had to wait quite a while in the station before her train went, but at last she was off. It wasn't a very long journey, but I think she thought it was. It wasn't more than three or four hours, but I could see she was getting more and more nervous by the way she kept opening the bag and fumbling over its contents. A boy came through the car with magazines, and I knew she wanted one, but she didn't get it. Then he came later with candy. She took me out then, and fingered me hesitatingly, and I was awfully afraid I'd go for that, sure. You see, she hadn't had any breakfast, and I knew she must be hungry. I suspected she hadn't dared to wait to

get anything to eat, for fear her father would wake up. Besides, I doubt if she had much in the house, anyway.

But she didn't get the candy. She put me back in the bag, and shut it up tight with a snap. She didn't open it again until just before she reached Boston, when she did it to get out her handkerchief to wipe her eyes. She had been crying, and her pretty face looked dreadfully worried. At the station all was hurly-burly and rush. I could feel the poor little thing being pushed here and there, and once or twice I heard her give a little half sob. Then I heard her whisper to herself:

"Why, he isn't here—he isn't here—anywhere! And I wrote him—I wrote him. Oh, what shall I do, what shall I do?"

She stopped a minute, then I heard her give a shamefaced little laugh. "Why, of course he isn't here—he couldn't be. He couldn't 'a' got my letter. I never wrote it till last night. But if I wait he'll come. He'll surely come if I wait. So I'll just have to wait."

She didn't say anything more for a long time; but I knew she was walking round and round that great station, waiting and looking for that man. Sometimes she'd get so tired she'd just have to sit down. By and by she fumbled in her bag and took me out with some other coins. She was standing before a lunch counter, and looking so hungry. She asked how much two doughnuts would be, then she sat down on the stool and said yes, she'd take them, please. Later, when she came to pay, I was worried again for fear she'd take me. But she didn't. She took another coin, and left me. And I breathed again.

Well, it got later and later, and I wondered what in the world the poor little thing was going to do. Two or three men and one woman spoke to her, and asked if she were alone, and couldn't they do something for her. But I didn't like their actions a bit, and I didn't believe they were really good and kind, and I was glad to have her answer them every time as she did that she was waiting for a friend—though I didn't think I liked that friend any better, for that matter.

By and by a real motherly, but decided voice spoke to her.

"See here, my dear child, I've been watching you for some time, and I don't believe you know where to go or what to do. Are you alone, my dear?"

"I am waiting for a friend," answered Rosie. She tried to speak bravely, but I could hear her voice shake.

"But, my dear child, it's been so long! *I've* seen you here more than an hour, and it's getting dark. Are you—forgive me for seeming officious, my dear, but are you acquainted with Boston?"

"N-no," faltered Rosie.

"Then isn't there something somebody else can do for you? Perhaps there's some mistake, and your friend isn't coming at all."

Rosie broke down then and began to cry.

"That's just what I'm afraid of," she sobbed. "You see, I didn't write him till last night that I was coming; and—and I don't know as he's got the letter yet."

"Your—brother,—or some relative?" asked the lady. And I could have hugged her for trying to find out who the man was.

"Oh, no, he isn't any relation. He's just a—friend.

He was going to help me—find me a place to work, you know."

"Oh, I see. And to-night—where were you going to-night?"

"I don't know," faltered Rosie, "and that's just what worries me. Don't you see? If he doesn't come I sha'n't know *what* to do."

"Is he an *old* friend, my dear?" I could see the lady was having her doubts just as I had.

"Oh, no, a new one; but he was so kind. I saw him up home this spring, and he said he *knew* I could get a job here."

"Hm-m; oh, he did, did he?" murmured the lady, in a queer kind of a voice. "Told you you were much too smart and pretty to stay forever in that small town, too, didn't he?"

"Why, yes, that's just what he said," cried Rosie in a surprised voice. "Why, how did you know? But maybe you do know—him. *Do* you know him? Oh, I hope you do! See, he wrote his name on this card here."

She opened the bag and took out the card. I caught a glimpse of the lady then, who owned the motherly voice, and I liked her looks even better than I did her voice. She took the card, and I saw her lips come together a bit firmly.

"No, I don't know him," she said, "but I think I'd like to—before I let you have anything to do with him," she finished under her breath, as she handed the card back, and Rosie put it into the bag again.

"But what can I do if he doesn't come?" almost sobbed Rosie. "What *can* I do?"

"I will tell you, if you will let me."

"Oh, yes, please, do," begged Rosie. "And I'll do just what you tell me—indeed I will!"

"No, my dear, you mustn't do what I say, or what anybody says, unless you know who we are," answered the lady promptly. "You can't trust people like that in a big city, my dear. Please remember that. You mustn't even trust me *alone*. But I'm going to take you to one whom you can trust. She's a Travelers' Aid, and she's here on purpose to see that girls like you do not fall into wrong hands. I think she'll send you to the Y. W. C. A. Anyway, she'll send you *somewhere* where you will be looked out for."

"And where I can get something to do?"

"Yes, she'll look out for that part, too. Come." And they walked away together.

Pretty quick I heard Rosie telling the whole story to both of them—all about her mother's death, Bobby's running away, her father's drinking, and the visit of the two women the day before, who were going to take her to the Reform School. And she seemed so glad to tell it. It seemed as if she just couldn't talk fast enough, she was so glad to find some one that was *interested*.

She opened the bag, then, and took out the card with the man's name on it, and showed it to the Travelers' Aid lady at the little table.

"Maybe *you* know him," said Rosie.

The lady gave one look and made an indignant exclamation.

"Know him! I should say I did!" she cried. "He's a bad man, Rosie, and you don't want anything to do with him. You say you wrote to him?"

"Y-yes," stammered Rosie. "He told me to."

"I'll warrant he did," answered the woman at the table grimly. "And it's a lucky girl you are that he didn't get the letter. But if ever you do see him

you get away from him just as fast as ever you can. Now remember."

"But he was such a nice man,'" protested Rosie, "and he was so very well-dressed, indeed he was; and he had diamonds and everything. He didn't *act* like a bad man at all."

"Very likely, my child; but I'll have to ask you to take my word for it in this case," replied the lady. "But, come, we'll see about getting you fixed up for the night."

Well, to make a long story short, they sent Rosie to the Y. W. C. A. that night, and she found lots of friends after that, who were real good to her. They helped her to get a place to work in a restaurant, and they persuaded her to write to her father, too, and tell him where she was. And they helped her in lots of ways.

But it wasn't easy for her, and she had a pretty hard time of it. She didn't have much money, but she didn't happen to spend me, so I saw all the first few weeks of her struggles in the great city. Then one day came my chance, and I know I was a real help to her. And it was tremendously exciting, too.

It was this way:

It was one Sunday, and she had started out for a walk. She had bought a cheap little bag purse, and she 'most always used it to carry her carfare in; and she had it swinging from her finger to-day. As it happened she had spent all the money in it but me, and I heard her laugh a bit ruefully as she looked into the purse before starting out.

"One lone little nickel! And is that all you've got?" she said to the bag. "Well, never mind, I'm going to walk to-day, so I sha'n't need any carfare anyway."

She had gone perhaps four or five blocks when she opened the bag and took me out. I saw that she was standing before a fruit-stand, looking longingly at some big red apples.

"How much?" she asked. But before the fruit-man could answer a voice cried:

"Well, if here isn't my little friend Rosie at last—and after all these weeks! How do you do, my dear?" And if it wasn't the tall, black-eyed man, with the big diamonds, Harry Lenox, the one that wrote his name on that card months before!

I knew by the way Rosie clutched me and faltered: "Oh, how do you do?" that she was frightened, and that she didn't know what to say.

"Well, well, if I'm not glad to see you!" he exclaimed. "Apples, is it? Let me get you some."

"Oh, no, sir, thank you, sir, but I couldn't really, sir!" And she began to back away hurriedly.

But the black-eyed man was not to be turned so lightly aside. He promptly followed, and fell into step with her.

"So you came, after all, to Boston, eh? Too bad I didn't get your letter in time, my dear. I was out of town—don't you see?—and it was too late to come, of course, by the time I got back, so you mustn't lay that up against me, my child. And to think of my running on to you like this! some luck—that! But now I've got you I mean to make the most of you. Where are you, and what are you doing?"

By the way Rosie stuttered and stammered over her answer I knew she'd been put wise to the sort of a creature he was; and that she didn't mean he should find out anything about her.

He asked a lot more questions, and said a lot

more things—things I knew Rosie didn't like one bit; but she couldn't get rid of him at all. The faster she walked, the faster he walked, and I was just beginning to wonder what the poor child would do when she made a sudden leap for a car that was just starting; and before the man knew it, or could make a move to get on, too, the car started and we were off.

Rosie gave a sigh that was almost a sob. Then the conductor came around and she handed me to him with another sigh.

Dear, dear, I was sorry to leave her, but wasn't I glad to have done something really worth while for her! I guess I was! Though so far as I myself was concerned I wasn't happy one bit. All mixed up with a whole lot of other nickels and dimes and quarters I was being shaken around in the conductor's pocket. After a long time he took me out, and started to give me to a lady in change; but the lady and another lady were having a terrible old time quarrelling as to which should pay the other's carfare.

"Oh, no, let me."

"Oh, no, it's *my* turn."

"No, you did it last time!"

"I didn't! *You* did." They kept saying.

And there they sat amiably disputing, while the whole car looked on and tittered, and the conductor stood first on one foot then on the other, until finally I think he swore. Anyway, he snatched both the women's ten-cent pieces, gave a nickel to each, and made off, and so neither one paid the other's fare.

I found myself the property of the fluffy-haired, befurbelowed woman that had protested the loudest.

She still protested, even when she dropped me into her bag.

And such a bag! Never was I in its like before.

In the first place it smelt so sweet it made me sick. And such a mess of things as there were there with me: a small powder-puff box, a tiny mirror, a gold watch, five samples of ribbon, four bits of embroidery silk, of different colors, pinned to a piece of paper, one big safety-pin, two small ones, five wire hairpins and two shell ones, a little comb, a silver pencil, three handkerchiefs, a piece of paper with all sorts of things written on it—her shopping list, as I found out afterward,—a little change, and a bill or two.

It wasn't long before she got off the car, after a very effusive good-bye to the lady who had quarrelled with her about the fare.

She went into a big church then. Her skirts swished and rustled as she sailed down the aisle, and into a seat away up front. The organ began to play like a violin away off somewhere far above our heads. Then nearer and nearer until it was like a whole orchestra crashing out splendid chords of harmony. The choir sang then, and in the hush that followed the minister began to pray.

Later he preached. It seemed there had been a terrible fire in the city, throwing numberless families into the street, and the churches were taking up a collection for them. It was a powerful plea. The minister just made you see those poor homeless creatures huddled together in the open streets.

Then he asked for a contribution.

"I want you to give. I want you to give till it hurts," he pleaded. "Then I want you to give a little bit more."

My new mistress gave a long sigh and shifted her position.

And I? All in the dark in that silly scented bag, I was fairly quivering with eagerness and suspense. Oh, I did so want to go and help! And yet, I was hoping that I wouldn't go. I realized now how small I was, and I wanted her to send the other bigger money, so as to help a lot.

Well, I heard the tramp of the boys going up after the plates, and I felt the lady's fingers clutch the bag a little more closely. Breathlessly I waited. Was I to be chosen, or some of the others? Was I to go to help—But why didn't she open the bag and pick us out? Nearer and nearer came those tramping feet, and not one move on the lady's part except a little tighter grip on that bag.

It could not be that she was not going to give—*anything*—not even me—not even a penny! It couldn't be, after that plea!

But it was. Already the feet had been by, and returned and stopped; and now the minister's voice was raised in blessing over the money. Almost immediately came the hymn and the benediction. A minute later my lady was rustling down the aisle again, and, if you'll believe it, talking with her neighbours about what a wonderful sermon that was—so touching and so appealing—and how could any one resist it? And all the while she was clutching us in that bag with a tighter grip than ever!

Well, I went home with her, of course. It was a very handsome flat, and she ought to have been happy in it. But she wasn't. Nothing was satisfactory. She complained of everything because it wasn't nicer, and she talked money all the time. As soon as she got into the house she opened the bag,

and dumped all the contents out on to a little stand near the window.

She barely waited to take off her hat and gloves before she counted us money, sorted out the samples, and studied the shopping-list. Then she picked up the Sunday paper and pored over the advertisements, looking real pleased at several items, and jotting them down on the shopping list.

By and by her husband came home, and he hadn't got inside the door before she began to ask for money, pointing to us on the table, and then to the long list of things she wanted to buy.

He refused at first, and said he couldn't afford another cent; but at last, with a despairing gesture, he plunged his hands into his pockets, threw her a bill or two, and banged out of the room.

A little later they ate dinner in the next room, and all the while I could hear her talking money, money, money, and complaining because she couldn't have two maids instead of one, and because her china and silver were so "mean and skimpy."

The poor husband got so he was nearly wild. At first he was real sorry, and tried to comfort her, telling her he was doing just the best he ever could. She complained then that he wasn't smart enough to get more. He got mad at that, and told her she was a heartless, extravagant woman, and he wished he'd never seen her. And all the while she was speaking he kept filling his glass and swallowing the contents down at one gulp, and filling it up again.—I could see him through the open doorway.

A few minutes later he came through the room where I was. His face was red, and his eyes were blazing. He was so drunk he couldn't walk quite straight, but he wasn't so drunk but what he saw

us money on the table. And to my dumbfounded amazement he came straight toward us, glaring at us and shaking his fist.

"Confound you," he snarled thickly. "I hate you! I hate the very sound and sight of you. Money, money, money; from morning until night, and night until morning. I wish I didn't ever have to hear your name spoken again. I might slave myself into the grave, and then not get enough of you to satisfy —*her*."

He jerked his thumb in the direction of his wife in the dining-room.

"I wish I was in my grave. I wish——" He stopped suddenly, threw another hurried glance in the direction of the dining-room, then stealthily walked over to a desk in the corner, unlocked a drawer, and took from it a wicked-looking revolver.

For a minute he stood gazing at it, then he muttered something under his breath, threw another glance toward the dining-room, lurched across the room to another door, banging it after him.

Pretty quick I heard the shot. Then all was screams, hurrying feet and confusion for hours. All that afternoon and night I lay unnoticed on the little stand. Then the next morning a strange woman, who had come in to help, grabbed me up and ran out into the street with me.

A ragged little newsboy was yelling: "Paper, paper, all about the Back Bay suicide!" And the woman ran after him.

"Here, quick, give me a paper," she cried.

The next minute I found myself dropped by a grimy little hand into a grimier pocket, and the boy was running on with me down the street, yelling: "Paper, paper—all about the Back Bay suicide!"

It wasn't long before he was all sold out. He got another batch then, and sold that. All the while I was still jingling in his pocket, though he took me out several times, and I expected I was going to be passed out in change. But I wasn't. He used the pennies mostly for that. And after awhile he sold his last paper, and with a little whoop of glee ran down a cheap, narrow street, through a doorway, and up three rickety flights of stairs.

"Jennie, Jennie, look a' dis," he called, pushing open a door at the top of the last flight. "Gee, but I've had luck ter-day. How's dat fur a haul?" And he emptied his pockets on to the table before her.

She was a pretty little girl with blue eyes and little yellow curls all over her head; but one little foot dragged, and she was on crutches.

"Oh, Jimmy!" she cried, balancing herself on the crutches and clapping her hands. "My, what a lot of money! You must 'a' sold a whole heap o' papers ter get all dat."

"I did. Some rich guy in de Back Bay plunked his head full o' lead, an' everybody wanted a paper ter read all about how he did it. Great luck fur me! Listen, we're goin' ter eat all we want, fur once. Trot out the dishes, an' I'll go get the grub. An' I'm goin' ter spend—oh, I'm goin' ter spend a whole lot. You'll see!"

With fingers that fairly trembled with eagerness, he picked out one coin after another from us, choosing me last, and holding me up to the little girl.

"Gee? Look at de nickel some guy tried ter plug, an' didn't. Never mind, there's enough left fur me, all right," he chuckled, dropping us into his pocket as he spoke. "Now I'm off; but I'll be back in no

time—no time." And with another whoop of glee he clattered down the stairs two steps at a time.

And what a good time he had buying things—bread, and doughnuts, and—after a long deliberation—a small pie. He had spent all but one other nickel and me when he took us out of his pocket and tossed us lightly up and down in his open palm. I saw then that he was standing before a store-window sign which read: "Ice cream to take home, ten cents up."

"Gee, but wouldn't I like ter s'prise Jennie," he was muttering under his breath. "Poor little kid, she just dotes on ice cream. I vow I'll do it, too!"

Tucking his purchases more securely under his other arm he turned toward the door, but stopped short with a remonstrative: "Oh, I say, quit that! Take a chap yer own size, can't ye?"

He was looking angrily at a big boy who was tormenting a pretty little gray kitten with a fluffy tail. But the tail carried now a rattling tin can, and the big boy was laughing heartily, and heading off the kitten from running away. Near by a little girl was crying and pleading with him to please, please stop hurting her kitty. Two or three other boys were running up the street, and soon the kitten was almost surrounded by a crowd of laughing, hooting boys.

"Say, quit it, can't ye?" cried my little newsboy again. And this time he advanced toward the boy angrily, still carrying the other nickel and me in his hand.

And then I had the surprise of my life: that big boy tormenting that poor little kitten was Bobby, Rosie's brother that ran away. I knew him in a minute. I knew his voice, and the hateful way he jeered at my little newsboy.

"Hoity, toity, what have we here?" he sneered. "An' who's goin' to make me quit it, I should like ter know. Tell me that!" And he gave the cat's tail another tweak.

"Well, *I'd* make ye, if I was big enough," stormed the newsboy; and I felt his grimy little fist double over me and the other nickel.

Bobby laughed and jeered some more. The other boys laughed, too. But the poor little kitten still dashed frantically round and round, and the little girl still cried bitterly.

Back and forth, jeers and threats and stormy pleadings—Bobby and the newsboy were not getting anywhere when suddenly the newsboy gave a relieved cry.

"Say, look-a here, I'll *buy* ye off, I will!" he exclaimed. "I'll *pay* ye, if yer'll quit."

"How much?"

"All I got—these." And he held out us two nickels on his open palm.

Bobby laughed derisively—though he took the money.

"*Ten cents!* And is *that* all? A great lot that is!"

"Maybe 'tain't a whole lot," bridled the newsboy; "but it's all I got here. Besides, ter Jennie, 'twill be a whole lot all right—she won't get no ice cream now. Come on, give us the cat, please, she's mine now. I've bought her."

"With ten cents? Not much you have," jeered Bobby, dropping us into his pocket with one hand, and stooping to pick up the kitten with the other.

The next minute, with another jeering laugh, he was running down the street, followed by the cries of the little girl, and the laughs of the boys as they hurried after. But we hadn't gone far when I guess

the kitten scratched him good and hard. At any rate he said a bad word under his breath, dropped the kitten, and ran down a side street alone.

And so now I belonged to Bobby, Rosie's brother. I didn't like my position at all. Not that I was crowded in Bobbie's pocket—there was little there but the other nickel and myself; but it was a dirty, evil-smelling pocket. Besides, I never had liked Bobby, and I didn't relish belonging to him one bit.

What he did then for a while I don't know. I only know that he carried us around in his pocket for some time. When finally he did take us out and look at us, he was sitting on a bench in the Common. There was me, and the other nickel, and a few other coins. He looked at us as if he wasn't real well pleased with us.

"Humph!" he grunted, jingling us in his hand. "Pity I can't find another cat to torment. Maybe I'd strike it richer this time. Hullo, by all that's lucky, if there isn't one this minute!" he broke off, with a chuckle. And I had just time to see a forlorn pussy slinking along under the opposite bench, when he dropped us into his pocket, and made a dive for her.

Just what he did then I don't know, but I guess he tore up an old newspaper and tied to her feet, by the sound, and by what he said to her under his breath.

But his little scheme didn't work worth a cent this time. Pretty quick I heard a feminine voice say sharply:

"Young man, what are you doing to that poor cat?"

"Oh, just foolin' with it," answered Bobby.

"Well, you'll kindly stop, please. I don't believe the cat likes that kind of fooling. Anyhow, I don't."

"Your cat?" asked Bobby, real smooth, but impertinent.

"No, it isn't my cat," answered the feminine voice indignantly. "But that doesn't make any difference."

"Oh, yes, it does," declared Bobby, smooth and impertinent again. "Because if it's your cat I'll *have* ter stop tormentin' it. See? And it *can* be your cat—easy."

"What do you mean by that, boy?"

"Why, you can buy it. See? Just give me enough an' I'll stop foolin' with it,—say, a dollar now."

"Why, you young wretch. Give you something, indeed! See here, young man, I *will* give you something, if you don't have a care! I'm a member of the Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and if you don't take the papers off that poor cat's paws and head this minute I'll call that policeman over there. Now I mean what I say. Do you hear?"

Bobby did hear, and I guess he saw she meant business, for I heard him snarl out something and rip off the papers. Then I knew he had got up and slouched off, still muttering under his breath.

The next time he took me from his pocket he was in the strangest place I ever saw. The walls were one mass of glass doors with pies and cakes and sandwiches, and doughnuts, and I don't know what all behind them. And everywhere I saw the sign five cents, five cents. Bobby was hesitating between a piece of pie and a jam tart when suddenly I heard a voice say:

"Hullo, Bob, how are you?"

He was a tall, good-looking fellow with a nice

face and clear brown eyes; and for a minute I couldn't think where I had seen him. Then I knew it was Joe, Rosie's beau from away back in her country town home—the one that had treated her to soda, and invited her to the picnic.

"Oh—er—hullo, Joe."

Bobby's voice didn't sound over and above cordial, and I wasn't surprised when Joe noticed it and laughed.

"I see you ain't giving me the glad hand, Bob. But don't worry. I won't let on back home that I've seen you. Besides, there's no one there but your father."

"No one there but father—what do you mean?"

There was a note of real interest and anxiety in the boy's voice, and for the first time since I had known him I liked him—a little. He pulled Joe to one side so he could talk, still holding me and the other nickel in his hand.

"I mean that the twins have been taken to a Home, and Rosie has come to Boston."

"Rosie *here?* Where? What for?"

"Then you didn't know it?"

"Of course I didn't know it. I haven't known a thing since I skipped—after mother went. I couldn't stand it there then, so I lit out."

"Hm-m; I suppose so—and neither could Rosie, I judge. Anyhow, she left, too."

"But where is she?"

"She's living at the Y. W. C. A., and waiting on tables in a restaurant. She's got a real good place now, one of them swell affairs—lots better than when she first came."

"You've seen her, then?"

"Yes, but she hasn't seen me. But she's goin'

to see me. I'm goin' up there some day." Joe colored up and smiled a bit sheepishly. "I'm going up there and sit down to her table, and see if she'll know me. Oh, I'll have to have more money than I have now, of course. I don't want her ashamed of her friends. She ain't in no nickel-in-the-slot place like this, I can tell you."

"Got a job, yourself?"

"Not yet—hunting one, though. And—you?"

"Nothin' doin'. Come on—let's get somethin' ter eat."

With a shrug Bobby turned to one of the little glass cupboards and chucked me through a tiny slot. Almost immediately then I found myself gathered up with a score of other nickels and taken to the young woman in the little wire cage in the corner. I knew I shouldn't stay there long, for a perfect stream of people were coming in and changing their dimes and quarters into nickels, so we were constantly being handed over the counter.

Two times that day I was handed out to some man only to be thrust back into some one of the little slots, and gathered up for the cashier again. I began to wonder if I ever was to be released from that stupid merry-go-round, when one night at supper time who should come up to the counter with a quarter but Joe himself, and I was passed out to him. I was mighty glad—only I did hope he wouldn't spend me. I was interested in Joe, and I wanted to see how he was coming on.

Well, he didn't spend me. He didn't spend much of anything, for that matter. He spent just one nickel, and he balanced that in his hand a long time before he finally spent it for a big piece of apple pie.

I stayed with Joe for some time, and I got real fond of him. He was hunting a job, and I went with him the next morning to answer an ad. It was a job delivering for a big store, and he got it. He was awfully pleased. I guess he had got pretty low on money. Anyhow there were only a few coins in his pocket besides me; and that night, after he had got the job, he pulled us out and talked to us. Told us we had been all that stood between him and starvation, but that everything was going to be all right now. He was going to be so faithful and do so well that that store just couldn't get along without him; and it wouldn't be any time at all before he'd be one of the firm. Then, when he'd got money enough so he didn't have to worry about living expenses he was going into politics and be governor and maybe President; but meanwhile he was going to marry Rosie just as soon as he'd got enough to make her comfortable.

He said this last kind of soft and under his breath; and after he'd said it he sat a long time not saying anything—just staring at us and thinking. But he was smiling, and he looked real happy.

As I said, I stayed with him quite a while. Once he started to spend me at the nickel-in-the-slot place, where he went for most of his meals; but he pulled me back just in time. He showed me to a fellow with him then, and laughingly told him that I was his mascot, and he was going to keep me for a lucky-piece always.

Yes, I saw you start, sir, and I knew what it meant. You recognize me now, and you remember. Yes, you were Joe, and I was the nickel mascot you had years ago. We've seen a good many changes since then, haven't we? And if things had been

different—but never mind that. I'll keep on with my story, and I'll go on about Joe just as I knew him and saw him,—and I'll still call him "Joe," though that isn't his real name as you very well know now. Well, Joe didn't find it as smooth sailing as he thought. His hours were long, and his work was hard, and by the time he'd worked a week he began to see that considerable would have to happen before he'd be a member of the firm. He used to talk to me about it. Nights, after he'd got his cheap little supper, he'd take me out and talk to me. He got lonesome, I s'pose, and wanted to talk to somebody; and there wasn't anybody in his little six-by-nine bedroom, so he took me.

And there was Rosie—he talked about her, too. He wanted to go and see her, and take her to places, but he didn't have money enough for that, yet; and until he did have he didn't want to let her know he was there at all. I knew he went up to the restaurant two or three nights, and followed her home to where she roomed, just to make sure she was there and all right. He saw Bobby once or twice, too, and he told Bobby where he could find Rosie, only he made him promise not to tell that he was there in Boston. He said when he got ready for Rosie to know he was there, he would tell her himself.

I began to wonder if I was really always going to stay with Joe, and if my days of adventure were ended. I'd heard him say he was going to keep me always, and I was so interested in him and Rosie that I didn't know as I should mind so much, after all. Still, existence in Joe's pocket was getting pretty monotonous, and I was just beginning to wish something exciting would happen, when something really did happen.

It was like this: Joe was delivering goods to a very nice house one day. I knew he carried the things into the house and up some very softly-carpeted stairs; and I knew we had to wait awhile for somebody to come.

As I found out afterwards Joe had taken three very handsome coats to a lady, and he was waiting for her to come and look at them to see which she wanted.

Well, after awhile she came, and the maid came, and Joe opened up the packages and the lady tried on the coats. She looked young and pretty but was an awful old Betty-fuss, I thought. She'd try first one, then another, then the third, then back to the first again, till I thought she never would settle the question, and I guess Joe thought so, too.

But at last she took one, paid the bill, and left Joe to do up the other coats ready to take back. He had got them all done up and was downstairs and out of the house, putting them away very carefully in his delivery bus, where they wouldn't interfere with the other packages, when all of a sudden the maid came and said that her mistress wished to see him at once.

Dear, dear, but such a time as there was then! It seemed that the lady had left two valuable diamond rings on the little stand near the window, and she'd missed them now, and she accused Joe of taking them. She'd got her husband to come into the room, and there was another man besides the maid who had been there in the first place.

My, but Joe was mad! I could see he was having all he could do to hold himself in. But he was courteous and just fine and splendid. Of course he denied absolutely having taken the rings.

"But I am *positive* I left them right on that stand not ten minutes before," declared the lady. "I went into the bathroom to wash my hands, then I was called out of the room for just a minute. I came back then to try on those coats; and there's been nobody but this fellow here since. He *must* have them. There's no one else that could have them, and I know I left them here."

"But are you sure, Dora?" demanded the lady's husband. "You might easily have left them somewhere else." Then he turned to Joe. "Did you notice the rings when you came in, young man?"

"I did, sir," said Joe.

"Oh, you did!" almost screamed the lady. "Then where are they? Hand them over instantly."

"Dora!" remonstrated the lady's husband sharply.

Then Joe spoke up, steady and firm, very quiet.

"I have not got your rings, madam; but I saw them. I even went over and stood and looked at them. I did not touch them, although I'll own up I did wish they were mine. I thought I could make good use of one of them, if I had it—the little one."

There was a bedlam of voices after that. The lady insisted that Joe had the rings, and that he must be searched in spite of anything anybody could say to her. The lady's husband tried to make her stop talking, but Joe had got mad then, and declared he should insist on being searched. So everybody went out then but Joe and the man who did the searching. But before they all went I heard Joe say to somebody very softly:

"You'd better put those rings where your mistress can find them."

"What do you mean?" It was the maid's voice that answered, frightened, yet full of bravado.

"I mean that you forgot there was a mirror in the room, I guess.—I was looking in the mirror," said Joe, very quietly.

The maid gave a low cry and hurried out.

A minute later Joe turned his pockets inside out for the man, and I was dumped on the table with all the rest of the things the pockets contained.

Well, Joe was searched, and he insisted on a thorough one; but of course the rings weren't found. But when he chucked his things back into his pockets his fingers slipped somehow, and I fell to the floor. It was a soft rug, and I made no sound, so Joe went off and left me there.

Almost at once then the maid came in. Her face was white, and she looked scared almost to death. With a quick look over her shoulder she thrust her fingers into her dress at the throat and pulled out two diamond rings. The next minute she had dropped them over behind the table just as if they had fallen there, or had been pushed off. Then with another backward glance and a long sigh she hurried from the room.

A minute later her master and mistress came in the other way. They were wrangling terribly over the affair. The lady was scolding and bemoaning the loss of her diamonds, and the man was upbraiding her for having Joe searched.

"What's the matter with your maid? Why don't you have her searched?" he snapped out at last. "She was here." And with that he turned on his heel and strode from the room.

Well, that immediately gave the lady a new idea —though I didn't believe, by the way the man spoke, that he really meant what he said at all.

But she took it that he did, I guess. Anyhow, it set her on a new track, and she summoned the maid.

Of course the maid indignantly denied having taken the rings, and she insisted so vehemently that she should be searched that the lady, evidently convinced of her innocence, said no, and sent her away.

All the while, just a little way from me on the floor lay the rings quite hidden by the leg of the table. I wondered when they would be found, and when I should be found. Meanwhile, I was very much interested in what was going on around me.

It was a beautiful room. I soon found it was the lady's private sitting-room. She was in and out of it all day, more or less, and I could not help seeing a good deal of what she was doing.

In the first place I saw right away that she wasn't happy with her husband. He was all wrapped up in his business, and paid mighty little attention to her. Even that evening, when he was sitting there with her, he had two telephone calls, and he spent all his time figuring out something on paper.

She tried to interest him in her new coat, but he wouldn't pay any attention at all, only grunted, when she paraded before him. Then she grew nervous and fretful and fidgety, till he spoke up sharply and asked what in the world was the matter.

She got nettled then into a bitter retort.

"Well, who wouldn't be fidgety and nervous," she cried, "what have I to interest me?"

"Interest you!" he snapped. "Good heavens! haven't you got everything you want now? What is it? More money?" And he reached for his checkbook, still keeping one eye on his figuring.

She jumped to her feet then, and began to walk up and down the room while she talked.

"Money, money, money," she cried. "You seem to think *everything* is money. But it isn't." (I began to prick up my ears. I had begun to think myself that pretty much everything was money, you see.) "I want *you*. I don't want your money all the time. I want your love and attention and *interest* in me. But I don't get it—not a bit. You're all business, business, business, from morning till night, day in and day out. You're even all business at home here. And me? All day I'm doing the same stupid round, luncheons, teas, bridge, luncheons, teas, bridge. And I hate it. I'm so tired of it all! If we had children—but you won't even let me adopt a child for fear it will make some noise somewhere, and you'll hear it, and so interfere with your precious figuring on some money scheme. Money, money, money—I hate it! I hate it all! I want something *alive* to love—and to love me!" And with a storm of sobs she flung herself down in her chair again.

Well, I was flabbergasted. This was something brand-new, and something I couldn't understand. Heretofore folks had bemoaned and bewailed because they *didn't* have money, not because they did. And yet here was a woman with all the money she could ask for, and still not satisfied.

The man acted as if he were flabbergasted, too. Anyhow, for a minute he just stared at her kind of helplessly, then he chucked the papers he was figuring on into his pockets, threw up his hands in a despairing sort of way, and strode out of the room.

At the door he turned.

"You needn't sit up. I sha'n't be home until late," he said coldly. "I'm going down to the club. I've got to figure out this deal somewhere to-night, and

you know very well how scenes upset me." And he was gone.

The woman never said a word. She heard him, of course, but she never turned her head. After he had gone she sat crying softly, for a time; then she sat up, wiped her eyes, and gazed listlessly around the room. She picked up a book, but read only a word or two. She tried a magazine, but dropped that, too. After a while she got up and went to the piano, but she only played a strain or two before she stopped, got to her feet again and strolled listlessly to the window.

Then the telephone on her little desk rang, and wearily she turned to answer it with a bored "Hullo."

Almost instantly, however, voice and manner changed.

"Oh, why, Mr. Lenox, is that you? How do you do?" she called gayly.

Of course what he said I do not know; but I soon gathered that he was asking if he might come over and call.

"But Mr. Benton isn't in," she answered.—"Oh, well, of course, if you don't mind just visiting with me, why I'd love to see you.—Oh, yes, yes, I shall be glad to have you come.—I *am* lonesome, yes. I'd just been wondering what to do with myself.—Yes.—Yes.—Oh, no, it's only a little after eight.—All right, come right along." And she hung up the receiver.

But what a change in her face and movements as she turned away. She was alert, happy, and interested. With hurried steps she crossed to the mirror, frowned at her swollen eyes and tear-stained cheeks, and rang for the maid. Then, my, my, what a prinking, from the top of her carefully-dressed

hair to the toe of her dainty white slipper, after first having her face cold-creamed and patted and massaged into glowing beauty.

She had to hurry. And she had barely finished and dismissed the maid when another maid came in, bringing the man's card. For a minute she hesitated; then, with a little lift of her chin she told the maid to show Mr. Lenox in there.

A minute later he came in; and then I had another surprise of my life, for Mr. Lenox was none other than the horrid, black-eyed Harry Lenox who had written his name on his card for Rosie months ago. He looked very handsome to-night, and I had to own that he was beautifully dressed. He advanced and bent over the lady's hand.

"In here—in your own little sitting-room, dear Mrs. Benton—I am fortunate, indeed!" he cried softly.

She laughed, and somehow the laugh sounded to me like the laugh of a pleased child who has suddenly found a playmate.

"Do you like it? I'm glad. I'm getting so I just hate those cold formal rooms down-stairs."

"One can never be happy with only cold formality," he answered her. "And you—you should always have warmth and sunshine and—and love around you, dear Mrs. Benton."

His voice was very low and tender, and I could have shaken him. Didn't I know what a scoundrel he was? But little Mrs. Benton only laughed and blushed, and said "Nonsense!" but she looked wonderfully pleased, just the same.

They sat down then and talked. And again I was reminded of a little lonesome child that had found a playmate, for Mrs. Benton was so trans-

parently happy and glad just to talk with some one who was interested. There was no doubt of that.

He praised her dress and her hair, and told her how beautiful she looked; whereupon she ran into the bedroom adjoining and brought out her new coat, childishly trying it on, and slowly turning round and round before him.

Of course he admired it, and said so very enthusiastically—but not too enthusiastically for praise-hungry little Mrs. Benton.

"Oh, I'm so glad you like it, and that you think it's really becoming," she cried. "You see, I—I didn't know whether it was or not. And it's so nice to have some one *interested.* And Mr. Benton, —he never cares what I wear, you see, not a bit, and——"

And then something happened. Mr. Harry Lenox sprang to his feet and came close to her as she stood with the wistful smile on her lips. He spoke low and very rapidly, but I caught quite a lot of what he said.

He told her how he knew Mr. Benton didn't care what she wore, and that her husband didn't half appreciate her anyway, and that he didn't deserve to have such a sweet, lovely, altogether adorable little wife as she was. He said he knew just how neglected she was, and how hungry she must be for love; but that she needn't ever hunger any more, for he had a whole heartful of it to give to her. And that he had come that evening on purpose to offer it to her; that he knew she would be alone, for he saw Mr. Benton go into the club.

And Mrs. Benton—she just stood there, looking shocked and frightened, and yet undeniably pleased. Any one could see she hadn't *meant* to bring any

such declaration, but that now it had come it sounded awfully sweet to her ears, only, somehow, she knew she hadn't ought to listen to it.

I think he was going to kiss her—when suddenly the door opened and Mr. Benton came in.

Of course they both jumped. Mrs. Benton backed away so suddenly that she backed right into the little table above me and overturned it. There were a few books and a bowl of flowers on it, and of course everything crashed to the floor, and the bowl broke.

Mr. Benton stood stock-still in the doorway, first amazed, then angry. You could see it creeping into his eyes as he began to understand matters.

For a moment nothing was said, then everybody talked all at once. I couldn't quite see what did happen, but a moment later Mr. Harry Lenox just seemed to melt away, and Mr. and Mrs. Benton were alone together.

He didn't say anything at first, with his lips, though his face said a whole lot. Very slowly he crossed to the table, and stooped to pick it up. As he did so he saw the two diamond rings now in plain view.

"Here are your rings, Dora," was all he said then, picking them up and handing them to her.

She took them without a word.

He picked up the table then, and set it straight on its legs again. Then he stooped and picked up the broken bowl, the flowers, and the books. Lastly, with scarcely a glance at me, he picked me up and kept me in his hand.

They sat down and talked then. First Mrs. Benton told him exactly what had taken place, and how surprised she was that Mr. Lenox should have dared

to say what he did. Unconsciously, as she told her story, she showed very plainly how hungry for love and admiration and *attention* she was; and I guess her husband saw it. Anyhow, he said he guessed, in the end, it was all his fault. He'd been thinking things over that evening, he said, and he'd come to the conclusion that he really hadn't been a very good husband to her, but that he was going to try to do better; and if she'd help him they'd start all over again. And he'd begin by telling her she might adopt all the children she wanted; and that he guessed he could stand the noise if she was happy. And he'd try to give her enough love and attention so that she would not have to look for it in other men.

All the while he was talking he was playing with me in his fingers, and as he finished speaking he dropped me absent-mindedly into his pocket. And I think then he took her into his arms and kissed her. That's what it sounded like, and she cried on his shoulder. So they made it all up beautifully.

I changed hands very rapidly for a time after this. The very next morning the man paid me out for a newspaper, and I became the property of another newsboy.

I didn't like this one at all. He was freckle-faced and red-headed, and he bullied all the other boys, particularly the boys littler than he was. He gambled, too—played marbles for keeps—and pretty soon he put me up. He lost me, too, but instead of paying me over he grabbed me up and ran with me down the street, followed by all the other boys, yelling and hooting.

They caught up with us at the next corner, and then there was a free-for-all fight, during which I

got knocked out of the newsboy's hand and into the gutter. Just as the boy who had won me was reaching to pick me up, a policeman came and the boys scattered in all directions, and I was left alone in the gutter. But not for long. A bootblack, who had stood near by, spied me, picked me up and chucked me into his pocket after a hurried look about him. A big, red-faced man with puffy cheeks came up to have his shoes shined just as I disappeared into the boy's pocket, and I was handed out to him in change a few minutes later.

The red-faced man turned into a drug store at the next corner and paid me out for a box of troches to cure his cough, and I found myself in the ever-familiar cash-drawer. But I didn't stay there two minutes, for before I could get my breath I was being handed over the counter again.

My new owner was a poor old woman with a shawl over her head. She tied me up with two or three other coins in the corner of a dirty handkerchief, and trudged off with me; but very soon she went into a bakery and paid me out for a loaf of bread.

I didn't get into the cash drawer this time, for the girl behind the counter took me from the hand of the old woman and gave me to a real pretty girl in change. The pretty girl put me into a little purse inside her muff and went out; but I didn't stay there long, for we hadn't turned the next corner before I heard a whining voice ask her if she wouldn't give just a nickel to get him something to eat with. He was so hungry, he said.

He put up an awfully pathetic tale about not having had anything to eat for two days, and not be-

ing able to work on account of losing his arm in an accident.

I thought the voice sounded familiar, but I couldn't quite place it till she took me out of her purse, and I saw who it was. It was Bobby, Rosie's brother.

He looked worse than ever. He'd pulled a slouch hat down over his eyes, and his coat was dirty and ragged. One sleeve hung empty at his side.

Poor fellow! I really felt sorry for him, and wished the pretty girl would give him more than just me. But when he dropped me into his pocket I wasn't sorry any longer, for that pocket actually sagged with coins, and he kept right on begging all the afternoon, and he got something almost every time, too.

I was still less sorry for him a couple of hours later when he took us home with him and the first thing he did when he got into his room was to empty his pockets, then slip off his coat and flannel shirt and unbind his arm from his side, where it had been held securely all the time under his garments.

With a long sigh and a wriggling of his cramped fingers, the young rascal stretched his arm away out, and doubled it back and forth.

"Gee, but that's tough!—but it's worth it," he chuckled, as he fell to counting the money on the table before him.

He put on his coat after a while, but this time he thrust both arms through the sleeves; and pretty soon he picked us money up again, dropped us into his pocket and went out. He got his supper then, and it must have been a good one, judging by the things I heard him order.

In the evening he took a car and went somewhere,

but I didn't find out till afterward what he did. What he really did, however, was to go out to the restaurant where Rosie worked, and hang around the door till he saw her go home. Then he followed her.

Not until he spoke to her, and I heard her little frightened cry, did I know what he was doing. Then I recognized Rosie's voice. Besides, he called her by name.

"Aw, Rosie, what's eatin' ye?" he cried. "Quit yer screechin' like that—ye'll have the cop on us in no time. Don't ye know yer own brother?"

"Bobby! Why, Bobby—is it you, really?" gasped Rosie.

I must confess she didn't sound real well pleased, so I wasn't surprised to hear Bobby answer:

"It sure is—but I notice you ain't given' me the glad hand, so's you'd notice it!"

"Why, Bobby, yes I am, too," protested Rosie. "It's only that—that I was so surprised. And you look so—so queer."

"Well, I guess you'd look queer if you hadn't had anything ter eat for two days," retorted Bobby, in his whiningest voice.

"Oh, Bobby, you don't mean you—you're actually —actually hungry?" gasped Rosie.

The real horror and sympathy in Rosie's voice ought to have shamed the humbug that he was, but it didn't.

"Well, wouldn't you be hungry if you hadn't had anything ter eat for two days? It costs money ter feed up these days."

"But haven't you got *any* money?" pleaded Rosie.

"Oh, yes, I've got—that," retorted Bobby. He had thrust his hand into the pocket where I and the

rest of the money was, and as he spoke he closed his fingers over me and pulled me out. The next moment I lay alone in the centre of his outstretched palm in the full glare of the corner street light.

"Oh, Bobby, only *that?*" Rosie was already fumbling with the fastening of the little bag she carried, her pretty face all sympathy and distress. "I haven't got much, but I've got more than that, and I can let you have *some,*" she cried, plunging her fingers into the bag and bringing out two or three quarters, and one half-dollar. "There, will that—help?" she finished breathlessly.

Bobby's fingers closed over the money greedily, and he dropped us all into his pocket again.

"Sure it will, Rosie! That's a good girl ter help her poor old brother out!"

"And now you'll get you something to eat?"

"Sure!" promised Bobby; but I noticed he changed the subject pretty quick, and he didn't say anything more about being hungry. But he was sweet as honey, and asked her all about her work, and how much she earned, and if she got many tips. And Rosie seemed so pleased to talk to *some* one that was interested that she told him everything he asked her, and a lot besides. She even kept him standing on the steps talking, she seemed so glad of the chance to talk. But Bobby broke away at last and went back to his room, after a drink at the corner saloon—which I think some of poor little Rosie's money paid for.

The next morning Bobby put all the money except a few pieces into a black bag and locked it up in a little cupboard at the foot of the bed. I was one of the few pieces he put into his pocket before he went out.

He had strapped his arm under his clothing again, and very soon he was in the same . . . business once more—begging.

Business wasn't very good that morning. Still, along toward noon he began to do a little better, and after a while he stopped and went into a restaurant to get something to eat. He was there a long time, and he ate a lot—if he ate all he ordered. He ate more than he wished he had a few minutes later, I guess, for the very next person he begged of, after he went out, said:

"Money? No, I never give money to street beggars, but I'll give you a good square meal. It shall never be said of me that I turned a fellow-man away hungry. Come with me."

It was a woman's voice, clear, decisive, and self-reliant. I suspected, by the sound of her, that she was a suffragist, and a maiden lady of no uncertain years; and I found out afterward, by her talk, that she was both.

Well, the lady marched Bobby into a restaurant —and I think she took him into the very one he had just come out from not two minutes before. I heard her, in her loud, clear voice, tell the waiter that she was going to give this poor hungry man *one* good square meal, if he never got another; and she ordered baked beans and brown bread and corned-beef hash and fish cakes. And every little while she'd keep telling him not to be bashful, but to eat all he wanted; and I could tell by the way Bobby choked and spluttered over the food that he was having an awful time to get all that stuff down on top of the hearty meal he had just been eating, not five minutes before.

And all the while she kept up an uninterrupted

fire of talking. First she told him how reprehensible it was that he should have got to such a pass as to have to beg for his living; and she tried to show that there was no excuse for him. She said it did not make any difference if he didn't have but one arm, there were plenty of things he could do; and she told about one-armed men whom she knew, and what wonderful things they had accomplished. Then she gave him a lecture on religion, and on politics, and on thorough mastication of food.

I guess at about this time Bobby began to slack up a little on the food, for I heard her say:

"But you're not eating—you're not eating anything, my man. I thought you said you were hungry. But maybe you were lying to me. Maybe you weren't hungry. There are so many cheats and frauds in this world that one never knows when one is being humbugged, and if you——"

But Bobby interrupted her vehemently, and assured her that he was hungry, indeed he was hungry. And I knew by his voice that he was cramming the food into his mouth. It was at about this time that plump into the pocket where I was came a greasy fishball, then a doughy slice of brown bread; and a minute later another fishball. I guess Bobby had got desperate, and meant to get rid of that food somehow.

Pretty soon he got up, and I heard them push back their chairs. I heard Bobby thank her, too, very effusively, but I noticed that he got away from her just as soon as he could, and I knew when he had got quite away by the long sigh that he drew.

He didn't beg of any one again for several minutes, and when he did begin, he didn't say anything more about being hungry. He told people now that he had

six little brothers and sisters at home all dependent on him, and that *they* were hungry. He didn't risk having another feed that afternoon, you see.

Well, I stayed with Bobby for a week or so—in his pocket, I mean. I just didn't happen to get put into the black bag at night, or spent during the day for quite a while.

Of course I got pretty well acquainted with him, and I must confess I didn't think much of him. He raked in quite a lot of money, but after a while I guess the police got suspicious of him for he kept out of their sight and didn't seem to dare to beg hardly any—and then mostly of women.

But about the meanest thing he did was the way he acted toward Rosie. Almost every other night he'd go up and wait around for Rosie to come out of the restaurant, and then he'd walk home with her. And every single time he did it he'd put up some hard-luck story, and whine about it until she just had to give him some money. I could have shaken him; and oh, how I did wish I could tell *her* what a trickster he was. But of course I couldn't do either. And then, just as it seemed as if I couldn't stand it any longer, he took me out of his pocket one night, and chucked me with a lot of others into the black bag. And there I was shut up in that cupboard with nothing ahead of me but darkness and solitude.

How long I stayed in that tiresomely stupid place I don't know; but it was many months for it was summer when I came out—and just let me tell you the way I did come out finally.

It was just at the time when I had about despaired of ever getting away from that dismal place that something happened. I heard a terrible commotion of shouts, screams, crashing blows, and the crackling

of burning wood. Smoke oozed into the bag and almost choked me; then a stunning crash split the bag open, and I rolled out through the smashed cupboard door to the bedroom floor.

Bobby was nowhere to be seen, so evidently the fire was occurring when he was away from his room. I could see the flames now all about me, reaching fiery fingers through every crack and crevice, nearer and nearer. Then came a deluge of water, and the hissing answer of the angry flames. But they were not to be subdued so easily, and they died down in one place only to break out in another. It wasn't long before there was another splitting crash, and I found myself falling, rolling, tumbling, down, down, down, until I thought the bottom of the earth itself must have dropped away. Here and there I caught glimpses of snake-like hose and smoke-begrimed firemen. Blackened boards and half-burned furniture rolled and tumbled along with me; at last I came to a stopping place in a dirty pool of water.

And there I stayed. After hours of smoking and sizzling the fire died down and the water drained away. It was days and weeks before the débris above my head was cleared away; and then the material for a new building began to arrive. I was half covered with dirt by this time, and many a foot had helped to press me farther and farther into the ground. Then one day when some boys were climbing about the place, and playing around, one of them spied me, and grabbed me up after a swift glance to make sure that none of the other boys saw him. Pretty soon he slipped away down a side street alone, and took me out of his pocket.

He looked me all over carefully, then began to polish me up on his trousers. Dear, dear, but I was

glad to get the dirt off me once more, and to be decent looking again. Oh, of course I wasn't so bright as I had been once, but I was lots better than I had been for some time before, and I felt quite respectable again.

But I didn't stay very long with my new owner. That very morning he met another boy with a brand-new cigar—a big black one—he had picked up somewhere. There was quite a crowd of boys together, and I heard them daring each other to smoke it. My boy swaggered round quite a lot, and said *he'd* smoke it—he'd *like* to smoke it; and if he couldn't smoke it 'twould be the first cigar he couldn't smoke! But they hooted and jeered at this, and declared they didn't believe he had ever smoked a cigar, anyway.

"Well, what if I hain't?" bragged the boy. "That ain't no sign I can't smoke this one. Aw, come on, let's have it!"

But the boy with the cigar still demurred and hung off, whereupon, with a very lordly swagger, my owner took me from his pocket and tossed me at the feet of the owner of the cigar. At the same moment he snatched the cigar from the other boy's hand.

"There, now it's mine, 'cause I've bought it. See?" he triumphed.

Somebody produced a match from somewhere, and I had just time to see my late owner somewhat awkwardly lighting his cigar before my new owner picked me up and pocketed me.

I guess the cigar made the boy pretty sick from what I heard then, though of course I couldn't *see* a thing, shut up as I was in that old pocket. But oh, how those boys did stand around and jeer and laugh

at my poor late owner. But then, after all, it was a good thing, I think. I hope it taught him a good lesson. Smoking is bad enough for great strong men without mere babies attempting it!

My new owner didn't keep me very long. He went away and left the boys, after a time, and the next thing I knew I was being handed over to an old apple woman for three apples. I didn't stay there long, either, for she passed me out in change to a very lovely girl who put me in her cheap little purse and took me home with her.

"Home" to her meant a plain little room up two flights of stairs. I found out how very plain it was when she took me out of her purse and counted me with the rest of the money she had. It wasn't much. When I saw how disappointed she looked after she had counted us, how I wished I was a five-dollar gold piece! She was eating her luncheon spread on top of her trunk in the tiny room. It was only dry bread and cheese, and the apples she had bought of the apple woman.

While she was eating, and before she had put us back in her purse, there was a knock at the door, and the landlady came in with a very imposing, richly-dressed lady.

The girl jumped up so quickly that the purse in her lap and all us money dropped to the floor.

"Mrs. Reynolds!" she gasped, growing very red, and then very white.

With a haughty wave of her hand the richly dressed lady dismissed the landlady, then she advanced and sat herself down stiffly in the chair the girl hurriedly placed for her.

I didn't like her a bit. I just *hated* her. And

pretty soon, when she began to talk, I knew why I hated her.

I can't begin to tell you all she said. But it seems that her son Fred had fallen in love with the pretty girl—"been bewitched" by her, the mother said. And the mother had come to ask her if she realised what would happen if she married him.

The girl tried to speak, but before she could get in a single word, the woman went right on talking.

She told her how thoroughly Fred's family disapproved of the marriage, and how utterly unsuited she—the pretty girl—was to a young man brought up as her son had been. Then she went on to say that it was her painful duty to tell her that if she persisted in this mad idea of marrying her son, it would result in life-long misery for them both; for the minute the marriage took place, Fred would be disinherited by his rich father. She would be the wife then of an utterly penniless young man, and not the wife of the wealthy youth she thought she was marrying. Therefore, by marrying him she would not only be bringing sorrow and disaster upon herself, but upon the young man she was pretending to love.

Mrs. Reynolds got to her feet then, and said she hoped she had said all that was necessary, and that the young woman would see the error of her ways and not ruin the career of a brilliant young man, particularly as it was going to bring no possible advantage to herself.

Again the girl tried to speak. She even hurried after the lady who was already at the door. But the lady only swept her silken skirts through the doorway and shut the door quickly behind her before the girl could say a word.

The girl began to cry then, and to talk brokenly to herself all the while she was kneeling on the floor picking us up.

"Money, money, money," she was sobbing. "As if I wanted his old money! I only wanted his love and—*him!* I didn't care if he didn't have a cent. But that woman—one would think money was the only thing in the world. Oh, I'm so glad, glad, glad now, that I—I didn't say yes last night. Only—only——"

There came another tap at the door, and the girl lifted a startled, tear-wet face.

"C-come in," she stammered.

And there in the doorway, bright-faced and happy, was—Rosie.

But Rosie's expression changed very quickly when she saw the other girl's face.

"Why, Bertha May, whatever in the world is the matter?" she asked.

And Bertha May told her. Sitting on the floor, with us money she had gathered in her lap, she told Rosie all about Mrs. Reynolds and her call, and the horrid things she said. But she told her something else, too,—something I had not known before.

"And just last night Fred a-asked me to marry him," she half sobbed; "and I—I refused him."

"Refused him! Oh, Bertha, how could you? You know you—care," protested Rosie.

Bertha May blushed a rosy red.

"Of course I care! I care too much to have him marry me, and then stop caring for me. I wanted him to be sure, *sure* he cared for me and no one else. Besides, I—I was afraid I wasn't suited to him. I told him to—to go and marry one of his own kind of girls."

"Oh, Bertha May, how could you?" cried Rosie. "And you out and out refused him?"

"Yes."

"Well, what did his precious mother say when you told her that?"

"I didn't tell her."

"You didn't tell her! Bertha, you don't mean that you let that woman talk to you like that, and then didn't tell her that you'd already refused the honor of being her daughter-in-law!"

"But I—I couldn't—I just couldn't," protested Bertha May. "And she talked so fast and said such —such awful things—and then she was gone before I could say a thing. I *couldn't* tell her."

"Well, I can," flamed Rosie, jumping to her feet, her cheeks an angry red. "And I'm going to, too. I won't have her misjudging you another day—not another hour. I'll go up there this minute. I know where she lives—that big house up on Commonwealth Avenue, on the corner—and I'll just *tell* her."

"Rosie, you're crazy!" gasped Bertha May, springing up in her turn, dumping on to the bed the money she had gathered, and catching Rosie by the arm. "You're crazy to *think* of such a thing."

"I'm not crazy. It's *you* that are crazy to let that woman go on thinking she had scared you into obeying her, when all the time you had turned him down *yourself*. Here, let me go—and you'll have to loan me carfare, too," she plunged on laughingly. "I've got just two cents in my purse here," she finished, diving her fingers into the coins on the bed. The next minute she had picked me and another nickel out from the rest, and had dropped us into the little mesh purse that she carried swinging from her

fingers. A minute later she was hurrying down the stairs with us.

As good luck would have it, she spent the other nickel for carfare first, so I had the fun of going out there with her. I was so glad. I wanted to see what she would say to that woman.

Well, I found out. Of course I couldn't see anything, but I heard it all. First I heard Rosie ask for Mrs. Reynolds and send in her name exactly as if she knew what she was doing, and had a right to do it. Then I heard Mrs. Reynolds greet her with a frosty word that would have frozen Rosie if she had not been so hot with anger. And Rosie didn't wait for any preambles. She started right in at once about her business.

"I came to see you about Miss Bertha May and your son. I wanted——"

"About—why, you impertinent hussy! What business is that of yours?" interrupted Mrs. Reynolds angrily.

"Because she's my best friend, and I love her; and——"

"That makes no difference," interrupted Mrs. Reynolds again coldly. "I never discuss my affairs with strangers, and I shall have to ask you to excuse me from listening to you. I really have no interest whatever in what you have to say."

I knew by her voice that she had turned away; but Rosie stood her ground.

"But you *will* have interest, Madam, when I tell you that Miss May had already refused your son."

"*Had* refused! What do you mean by that?" There was no doubt of Mrs. Reynolds's interest now.

"What I say. She refused him last night before

she knew that he would be penniless if he married her."

"Nonsense! I don't believe it. As if any girl in her senses would refuse a chance like that! She's only trying to save her pride, sending you to me with such an absurd story as this—the idea! I wonder if she really thought I'd believe it!"

"She did not send me—I came myself," flamed Rosie indignantly. "I wanted you to *know* the kind of girl you're trying to keep your son from marrying. I wanted you to know that she was fine and splendid enough to say no to him just because she *did* care for him too much to be any sort of drag on him, and she did it before she knew he would be penniless if he married her."

"*I penniless?* What do you mean?" demanded a masculine voice, sternly. "Excuse me, mother, but I heard what this young woman said as I came into the room, and—and I don't quite understand."

It was the son, of course. I knew that at once, and I liked him right away. I liked his voice.

"Are you Mr. Fred Reynolds?" I heard Rosie ask eagerly.

"Yes. And—you——?"

"I am Bertha May's friend. Please, would you mind telling your mother that Miss May *did* refuse to marry you before she knew you would be penniless if you married her?"

"*I penniless?*" ejaculated the young man again.

And then he asked two or three questions, short and sharp. Of course the whole story came out then, and I could just feel how angry he was. It seems his mother had lied, deliberately lied, and he wouldn't be penniless at all, even if they did disinherit him,

for he was worth a hundred thousand in his own right, from his uncle.

I could see he tried to shield his mother all he could, though it couldn't help coming out that she'd lied to Bertha May. He got Rosie away just as quickly as possible, and when they got outside he asked her to get into his automobile with him and ride back to Bertha May. He said he was just going to make her say yes this time. He talked just lovely. I didn't blame Bertha May for caring for him.

Well, of course, Rosie didn't have to spend me for carfare on the way back because she rode in the auto. When they got there they jumped out and Rosie told Mr. Fred to wait in the boarding-house sitting-room while she went up and told Bertha he was there.

"Well, I didn't have to use only one of your nickels, after all!" she burst out, as soon as she got into the room; and she picked me out of her purse and tossed me on the table.

She told Bertha then all about everything, and fairly dragged her, all blushing and teary, out of the room. And they went downstairs together. After a long, long time Bertha May came back alone; but I guess everything was all right, for she looked so happy and pleased and shy that I wanted to hug her. I didn't blame Fred Reynolds for loving her.

She fussed around the room, and looked in the mirror, and tried on all her finery, and did her hair two or three different ways, and was so happy!

The next morning she picked me up from the table and put me in her purse again with the other money, and very soon she was on the street.

It wasn't long before I heard a child crying—a little girl. Bertha May stopped and talked to her,

and asked her what was the matter. It seemed the little girl had fallen and bumped her knee.

"Dear me, but we can't have anybody unhappy *to-day,*" cried Bertha May. Whereupon she pulled me out of her purse and thrust me into the palm of the little girl's hand. Then she wiped the little girl's face with her handkerchief, told her a story to get her to laughing, and then went away with a merry wave of her hand.

When she had gone the little girl opened her hand and looked me over. Then, with a beaming face she ran home with me to a dingy little attic in a rickety tenement house.

It was a forlorn looking place with a crying baby, two or three other children, and a pale-faced, tired-looking woman, whom the little girl called mamma.

With great glee the little girl showed me off to each one in turn.

"And may I have it, mamma, for all my very own?" she begged.

The mother sighed and hesitated. I could see her eyes go from the little girl's eager face to the table on which were a few broken dishes, and a few bits of unappetizing-looking food. I knew she was thinking that I ought to be used to buy a loaf of bread; but in a minute I saw a look of set determination come to her face.

"Yes, Nellie, you shall," she cried then. "It was given to you and it belongs to you. You shall have every cent of it for your very own."

"To spend just as I want to?"

"Yes, just as you want to."

The little girl clapped her hands, thereby dropping me on the floor; but in a moment she had picked me up again.

"Oh, goody! Now what shall I get?"

They all tried to answer that question for her, each one suggesting something different. One proposed a loaf of bread, another a visit to the movies. A third declared that a boat-ride around the lake in the Public Garden would be the very nicest thing possible. And of course peanuts, candy, raisins, dates, figs, apples, oranges, and gum came in for clamorous bids. Indeed I got quite excited myself when I realised what a lot of things I was good for; and of course I had a very lively curiosity as to what I really would be spent for finally.

Well, the next day the little girl started out to spend me. But, dear, dear, what a time she had! From gum to candy, and candy to apples, and apples to oranges, and oranges to dates, and dates to figs, she fluttered happily but never a one did she buy. She gazed long at the cakes and cookies in the bakery window, and she half turned toward the door; but she didn't go in. Before the movie posters she stood also, thoughtfully, and then she went down to the Public Garden and watched the swan-boats sail gracefully around the pond.

She stood so long before the sign that said five cents a trip that I thought my fate was settled, sure. But in the end she turned away from that.

All day she kept this up. She just *couldn't* decide on what to spend me for. But all the while she kept singing a happy little song under her breath, and at night when she told her mother all about it, she finished by saying:

"And it's almost as if I was having every single one of the things, 'cause I *know* I'm going to have one of them; and it'll be just the one that I want the mostest, and that will last the longest."

The mother said "yes, yes, darling"; but I could tell by her voice that she was only half listening. And pretty soon I found out the reason; the baby was real sick.

I heard them talking how they wanted to have the doctor, but didn't see how they could afford to have him. But in the night the baby got worse, and they just had to send for him.

I could see and hear everything, for the little girl had put me on a little low shelf behind the stove for safekeeping. So I saw how they all flew around trying to do something for that poor suffering little baby.

Well, at last the doctor came, and very soon he got the baby easier; but he told the mother that it was only temporary, and that the baby would keep having the attacks unless she could get it away some from that hot little attic room. He said that the baby would have to be taken to the country or seashore, where it could get cool, fresh air, and plenty of it, or it would die.

The little mother got real angry then, and asked him if he thought she was a fine lady living up on the avenue, and she didn't have anything to do but to open her purse and buy houses at the country and the seashore. She got real hysterical in her talk, and then she began to cry; and the doctor had to comfort her as best he could, though of course he couldn't take back what he had said about the baby's really needing very much to get away for cool fresh air.

After he had gone the little girl, Nellie, reached up and got me down from my shelf. For a long time she held me in her hand, thinking, looking at

me wistfully; and every now and then giving me little pats.

At last she walked over to her mother and held me out.

"Will this help *any* to send Baby to the seashore?" she faltered.

"Bless your dear heart! no, child," cried the mother, beginning to sob again. But she caught the little girl into a warm hug, and kissed her, and told her she was mother's comfort; and she thanked her for being the generous little girl she was. But she told her to go out and spend me for something she wanted herself; that I really wasn't big enough to do any good about sending the baby away.

So the little girl, after a long sigh, put me back on the shelf again. Then, in a little while, the family all quieted themselves down to sleep.

The next morning the mother got the breakfast and then went out to wash and scrub floors—that was her work, I found,—leaving the eldest girl at home to care for the baby. One boy sold papers, and another worked in a store.

The baby was feeling and acting better this morning, and Nellie was just about to start out to spend me when the boy who sold papers came running in.

"Here, look a' dis," he cried, opening up one of his papers and spreading it before them on the table. "Here's all about de Floatin' Hospital, where dey takes sick little kids like Tommy here, an' makes 'em well. Folks pays money ter take 'em. See? Here dey are—all dese—dey paid money!" he exclaimed excitedly running his finger down one of the columns. "Dat's where we wants Tommy ter go."

They all crowded around the table and talked

all at once, even lifting Baby Tommy himself up so he could see.

"But where is it? How do you get 'em ter take him?" demanded Nellie.

"I do' know—but de paper folks 'll know," cried the boy. "I'll go ask 'em."

"Oh, do yer s'pose they would?" cried the eldest girl.

"We'll ask 'em. We'll tell 'em they've just *got* ter take him," cried Nellie eagerly. "*I'll* go. *I'll* go ask 'em. An' I'm a-goin' ter give 'em my nickel, too. Oh, they will take him, won't they—if we pay *money?* Come, come. Hurry, before the boat gets all filled up!" And she fairly dragged her brother from the room.

It was a long walk to the place where the paper was published, and I knew Nellie was getting tired by the way she walked; but she never said a word about that. She only talked all the time about how splendid it was going to be for Baby 'way out to sea on that wonderful ship.

And all the while she clutched me tightly in her hand, except once when she had to wait to cross a crowded street; then she opened her fingers and looked at me wistfully; and I saw that right beside her where she was standing was a whole window full of candy.

At the newspaper place she told her story, all about how sick Tommy was, and how the doctor said he must be taken away where it was cooler. She begged them to take him on the big ship, and couldn't he go right off to-day, please? And she told them she would give them all the money she had, and she did hope it would be enough. Then she held me out on her open palm.

We had a great time then. First the man wasn't going to take the money, but another man who had overheard the story, hurried up and said yes, by all means to take the nickel; that he believed that nickel was going to be worth a thousand dollars, and maybe more, to the Floating Hospital Fund. But when the first man asked what in the world he meant, he only laughed and said "wait and see."

The new man spoke to Nellie then, and said he wanted to know all about that nickel—where she got it, and how long she'd had it. Nellie got kind of shy then, all of a sudden; but her brother spoke up and told all about how she got it, and how they had all told her what to spend it for; but that she hadn't made up her mind yet, because she didn't know which of the things would last the longest.

And the man kept nodding his head and saying, "Yes, yes, good, good—I see!" all the while the boy was telling the story. Then he said he was going home with them to see Tommy, and take his picture, and their pictures. And he seemed as tickled as a boy with a new toy. He said he'd go right away with them; but first he was going to put me where I'd be perfectly safe, for I was the most precious possession they had at that moment.

My, but I felt puffed up. We do like to be appreciated in this world, don't we? Well, but this wasn't anything compared to what happened to me afterward. First he locked me up in a box in his desk while he went home with the children. Then, if you please, I had *my* picture taken. I *hoped* they'd take the pretty side, where there was no scar. But they didn't. They took the ugly side with the scar.

The next day they put me in the window, and

what do you think? There was the whole story all printed on the first page of the newspaper, and my picture, and Nellie's picture, and the baby's picture, and the room where they lived, and all. And there were pictures, too, of Nellie looking in at the store windows at the cakes and candy, and watching the swan-boats and the moving picture crowds, and trying to decide how she'd spend it for the thing that was going to "last the longest." Then they showed her bringing it to the newspaper for the Floating Hospital Fund. And in big letters it said:

"NELLIE GAVE HER NICKEL. HOW MUCH WILL *YOU* GIVE?"

Well, I stayed there, and all day the window was mobbed with people looking in, so that two or three times the police had to come and clear the crowd away. And everybody looked at me. Why, I never felt so proud of myself in my life. Dear, dear, but it was exciting!

But this didn't end the thing, mind you. For days and days they kept it up, only very soon they began to state in big letters how much *other* people were giving, and how splendidly the Fund was growing. And every day they always headed the list with those same words:

"NELLIE GAVE HER NICKEL. HOW MUCH WILL *YOU* GIVE?"

And the crowds kept coming and coming, and the money kept pouring in. Why, it was the most exciting thing you ever saw. Sometimes I saw people I had seen before—people I had belonged to,

I mean. I saw several of those. And one day I saw Rosie. I saw Joe several times in front of the window. They almost met the day Rosie came. Joe had just turned away as she came up, and they never saw each other. I saw Harry Lenox once, and the woman whose husband shot himself. One day Mrs. Benton came, and she looked *so* happy. She had a little girl with her, and they both went in and paid some money to the fund—a good big sum, too, for I read about it in the paper the next morning.

After a while they had Baby Tommy's picture in again. They showed him at the seashore this time. Somebody had sent the whole family for a month, and Tommy was getting real fat and well, the story said.

Well, after they had got a lot of money, they had a new scheme, and pretty soon I began to hear them talk about auctioneering me off. And then I saw the big headlines in the paper advertising that Nellie's nickel would be auctioned off to the highest bidder. And they said:

"WHO WANTS NELLIE'S NICKEL?"

Only think of little me being so important as that! Do you wonder I was excited? I couldn't sleep nights. Besides, of course, I wondered what was going to become of me.

Well, the day came, and the place was crowded. All kinds and sorts of folks were there, and I sat up in full view of them all, on a white satin cushion in a little velvet box, tipped up sideways.

The auctioneer was wonderfully bright and witty, and he said lots of funny things all through the bidding. They started bidding at a dollar, but they

went up to one hundred dollars in no time; and, if you'll believe it, that man worked the bids up to one thousand dollars—and who do you think it was that bought me? Mr. Benton! And Mrs. Benton and the little girl were with him, and they all looked as happy as could be.

Mr. Benton wrote his check in payment for me—think of it, one thousand dollars for little me, and all because I was Nellie's nickel!—and then he shut me up in the little box and slipped me into his pocket. He was just going out the door when I heard a man ask him if he would sell me to him.

The man said he couldn't pay a thousand dollars, of course, nor anything like it, but that he would put one hundred dollars into the Hospital Fund if Mr. Benton would sell me for that.

When Mr. Benton asked him what he wanted of me, he said he was a sleight-of-hand and juggler entertainer, and he wanted me to use in his work. He said he thought I would help him, and he didn't believe it would do the Fund any harm for that matter, for of course he should advertise that he was using Nellie's nickel.

Mr. Benton laughed, and said all right; that he hadn't any use for me himself, and if there was any more good I could do, he was quite willing to let me go. So the man handed over a hundred dollars to the Hospital Fund. And I went off with him.

And so once more I found myself conspicuously before the public. In all the papers and programmes I was advertised as Nellie's nickel, and the man used me in his tricks on the platform.

Of course it was a brand-new experience for me, and for a time I rather enjoyed it. The man wore black tights and spangles on the stage, and he was

made up to look very handsome. Part of the time he used me in the juggling half of the programme, and part of the time in his sleight-of-hand. In the juggling part he tossed me up with a lot of other things: an iron ball, a wooden top, a knife, and a flower. The game was to keep all of us going, and to catch us without ever letting any of us fall. It was wonderful how he did it. I never saw him fail but two or three times—and we were all so different in shape and size and weight! I don't see how he ever did it. Several times I was just sure he was going to drop me but he never did but once. His palm was always ready there to catch me.

In his sleight-of-hand work I'm afraid he deceived a little, for he had a lot of nickels to look just like me, and he had to put a little private scratch on me, so as to tell me from the others.

In this part of the programme he was always losing us and finding us in the most impossible places. Why, he'd get men and boys up on the stage, and then pretend to pull us out of their pockets, and even their mouths. It was very funny.

He was performing at Keith's when I went to him first, and he showed at one or two other Boston theatres afterward. Then he took me away to other cities—New York, and lots of others.

I guess I stayed with him almost a year and I had begun to wonder if I never was going to get back to Boston again, where I liked best to be, because I knew so many people, and where there was always the chance that I might see some of them. Especially I wondered about Rosie. I never forgot Rosie. So I was very glad when at last the man came back to Boston and showed his old tricks.

But I could see very soon that he was losing his

audience. They didn't laugh and clap so much now, and lots of people got up and went out. I knew he tried to advertise that I was Nellie's nickel again, but evidently people had forgotten all about me, and they wouldn't even clap me, which mortified me greatly. It isn't very easy, after you've been a stage favorite, to be a nobody. I know now how to pity some of these actors who die poor and forgotten in some garret.

Well, my juggler didn't take kindly to loss of prestige and patronage, any more than I did, and he began to drink. He tried hard to get a chance to show again, but even the cheapest playhouses would have none of him now.

I knew that his money was dwindling fast, and pretty soon I found out that he was gambling. Sometimes he won, but more often he lost. And by and by he got so short he even began to spend some of the nickels he formerly used in his shows, and I wondered when my turn would come.

I was rather sorry for the man, but I was really quite elated at the idea of leaving him, for I was tired of my present stupid existence, and was longing for adventure again.

Well, at last the night came when, like you, he was down to me, his last nickel. Like you, too, he talked to me, and asked me what he should do. Should he spend me for a drink to help him forget, or should he spend me for carfare to take him to apply for that job he saw advertised in the paper before him? Or should he let me take him in the opposite direction to the river, where he could end it all forever?

You see, sir, his question was much the same as

yours was a little while ago, just before I began to talk.

Well, as he sat there thinking, and talking to me, I found suddenly that he was telling me the story of his life, and he was beginning away back when he was a boy on the farm.

He told of his mother, and of how good and kind and loving she was; and of how she used to talk and plan what great things her boy was going to do. He told about his little sister, too, and he said she looked something like Nellie—little Nellie of the nickel. And he said her name was Nellie, too. He had been awfully fond of that little sister—perhaps because she was lame, and she called him her other legs, because he carried her around so much and was so good to her.

She didn't live to be very old, he said; and his voice grew unsteady and husky as he told about the night she died and what she said to him. He said Nellie always expected he was going to be President. She expected great things of him—Nellie did.

Then he went on to tell about his youth, and how he left the farm and went to the city, and the temptations he found there. Then is when he learned to gamble. He was a mere lad of sixteen when he committed some kind of misdemeanor, and was sent to some sort of place where he mingled with men old in crime and wickedness, and from whence he came out forty times less likely to live a life of upright honesty than he was when he went into it.

However, after many ineffectual attempts to get work he at last found a good job, but his love of excitement made sitting at a desk monotonous, and he soon threw it up to join a travelling show.

There was a juggling and sleight-of-hand performer in the troupe, and it was there that he got his first lesson in that sort of thing, and began to get infatuated with the life.

His mother died while he was with the troupe in the West, and after that he felt even less restraint, though the dear memory of her did reproach him sometimes. And there was his sister, Nellie—the dear memory of her would come, too, and reproach him. He realised, also, how far, far short he was of coming to what Nellie would want him to be. He said it was really Nellie that had attracted him first to that other Nellie's nickel; and he had wanted to do something for the fund for Nellie's sake. He knew it was really for that reason that he had bought the nickel—though he tried to cheat himself into thinking it was business—just a good business move.

And now he had come to this, he said, his last nickel; and he guessed the best way out of it would be—the river. But first he'd destroy things—the few things he had—so that no one would know who he was.

He went to his battered little trunk then, and began to take things out. There wasn't much there. All the clothing had long since been pawned except his spangled stage suit, now grown tarnished and shabby indeed.

There were a few letters, which he tore up, and a quantity of old programmes. He wiped his eyes once or twice over the letters, and again over the programmes. It was among the programmes that he found the newspaper with the story of Nellie and her nickel, and of how bravely she had given up all

her own pleasure for the sake of the little baby brother.

"Nellie, dear little Nellie!" I heard him mutter; and I knew by his voice that it wasn't this Nellie, but the little sister Nellie of long ago that he was thinking of.

He flung out his arms and put his head down on the paper on the table then, and his shoulders shook. I knew he was crying, and I believed it would do him good. And it did. For after a while he raised his head and picked me up. Suddenly he gave a low cry and looked very sharply at the scratch he had made to distinguish me from the rest of the nickels he had had made like me.

"It is—it is Nellie's own nickel!" he cried softly. "The one she carried for one whole day, trying to settle what she'd buy with you. Bless your dear heart, I guess I won't use you for the river. 'Twould be sacrilege. And for the sake of—Nellie, I'm going to make another try."

Well, it was dark then, and nearly night. But the next morning he brushed himself all nicely, looked again at the *ad* in the paper, picked me up and put me in his pocket. On the way downstairs I heard him tell his landlady that he'd surely have money to pay the rent soon. And his voice sounded so confident and ringing that I just knew he was going to get that job.

He paid me out for his trolley fare, of course, and so once more I was afloat upon the world. This time I was put into one of those grinders on a pre-payment car and ground down with a lot of other nickels into the little pan underneath, and thence into the conductor's hand and paid out again. The first person he handed me out to paid him right back

with me, so I had to be ground all over again; but the next person was a very well dressed lady, and she paid out the other nickel, and slipped me into her gold mesh bag.

When she got off the car she went into a restaurant to lunch, and imagine my delight when I found it was the very restaurant where Rosie worked. She sat down at Rosie's table, too. Of course the way I found out all this was because I heard Rosie speak when she told the lady they were all out of something that she had ordered; and of course I knew her voice.

The lady was rather disagreeable over the affair, and found quite a little fault with other things; but Rosie was patience itself with her. Really, I didn't see how she stood it, but I suppose she'd have lost her job if she'd been anything else.

Well, by and by the lady opened her purse to pay her bill. When the change came back I guess there was nothing small enough to suit her idea of a proper tip. Anyhow, she dropped it all back into her gold mesh bag, then, after a moment's hesitation, she singled me out and laid me on the table beside her plate.

Think of it! A five-cent tip—the stingy thing! —and she with all her fine feathers and silks and diamonds! But I soon forgot all about my anger in my delight at being with Rosie again.

And Rosie, if you'll believe it, had the grace to say thank you, as she slipped me into the little pocket of her apron.

It was a muslin apron, and so thin I could see through it dimly, so I just enjoyed looking about me, and seeing the kind of life Rosie had to live.

It wasn't an easy one, I assure you. There were

lots of things that must have made it awfully hard for her; but Rosie was patient and sweet through everything, and I was proud of her. She had developed into a lovely girl, certainly.

She got quite a few coins in tips, but I was the only nickel,—for which I was glad.

It was almost six o'clock when the great adventure came. I think I saw him first—Joe. He was standing by the door, and I knew he was watching to see which tables Rosie waited on. After a minute he came in and sat down; and I didn't believe Rosie knew who he was when she went up to wait on him. I *knew* she hadn't known when I heard her cry of: "Why, Joe Harris, is it really you?" I knew then, too, that this was the first time she had seen him anywhere in Boston.

They talked then, what they could, but they couldn't talk much, for Rosie said Mr. Banks, the restaurant man, never liked it if the girls talked to the customers. But they'd get a word or two every time she brought anything, or took anything away; and I noticed Joe kept wanting something new, so he had to have a lot of attention, and it took him quite a while to eat.

I guess he got four or five courses. Anyhow, I heard Rosie tell him demurely that if all the customers were like him Mr. Banks would be a millionaire in a short time. One thing Joe did do, and that was to ask Rosie what time she got out, and if he might come around and wait outside to walk home with her; and she said: "Yes, oh yes, indeed." And I knew by the way she said it and coloured up that she was real pleased and happy.

Well, after a while Joe just had to go. He had eaten up every crumb, and Rosie had brought him

his finger bowl. But even then she had to plead with him to please go, before he'd stir. She told him that everybody in the place was noticing things, and that the girls were already beginning to jolly her. So wouldn't he please go.

And Joe went. I think he started to lay a tip on the table, but she looked so distressed and begged softly: "Oh, Joe, please, not *you!*" And Joe didn't do it. A minute later he had gone.

I knew Rosie was excited by the way she tripped back and forth for her other customers after that; and I knew she was just wishing for closing time to come. She had told Joe that she would be out a little after half-past eight; and I knew she was watching the clock.

But Joe hadn't been gone fifteen minutes when something else happened—Harry Lenox came in. He waited just as Joe had waited at the door, watching to see which were Rosie's tables. The head waiter came up, but he waved him aside just as Joe had done, and acted as if he wasn't quite ready to sit down.

I don't know whether Rosie saw him or not, but I think she did, for I felt her start suddenly, and an empty dish slipped out of her hand and crashed to the floor.

Of course poor Rosie blushed awfully then, and picked up the pieces hurriedly; and of course the head waiter came up and said something short and sharp; and the girls jollied her again about Joe; and wanted to know if she was still thinking of him; and I thought poor Rosie was going to cry.

Pretty quick I saw that Mr. Harry Lenox had gone to one of Rosie's tables and sat down, and I supposed of course Rosie would go to him. But she

didn't. She went everywhere but to him, and she acted as if she just didn't see him.

But in a minute the head waiter came up to her again, and asked her sharply where her eyes were, and didn't she see she had a customer. So then she just had to go.

"Well, by Jove, if here isn't my little wild-Rosie friend again," cried Mr. Lenox, the minute she came to the table. "Are *you* here?" he asked. Just as if he was surprised—the villain!

Rosie just bowed and murmured "Yes, sir." Then she pushed the bill of fare a little nearer, and busied herself getting him bread and butter and water.

But every time she came near him he had something to say, and it took him ages to select what he wanted. She just had to tell him at last very coldly that Mr. Banks did not allow the girls to talk to the customers, and she would have to ask him to excuse her from replying to his remarks. But he just laughed and joked the more, and said:

"Ho, I'll attend to Banks, don't you worry, my dear. If he says anything disagreeable, just send him to me. Rosie, you're prettier than ever. Why, you'd be a real beauty—with the right clothes! Come, come, my dear, tell me what time you get out of this grind at night—there's a good girl!"

But Rosie only shook her head and went away, after making sure that he had everything he needed on the table. Back among the girls she was jollied again; and they told her she was improving all the time; that this one was lots better looking, and they guessed he had more "dough," too.

I must confess that Harry Lenox was looking specially handsome that night, and his good clothes

and his diamonds did make him look mighty prosperous. But of course poor Rosie only got more and more distressed at the insinuations and jokes of the girls, and I thought once she was going to cry.

Of course she had to go back and take his dishes, and bring him his dessert, and he took a long time, too. She brought him his check long before he had finished, and she wouldn't go near him at all again after she had brought him his change, and at last he just had to go. It was almost half-past eight then, and the room was nearly empty. He left two half-dollars on the table, but Rosie wouldn't pick them up, till some of the girls saw them and she just had to, to keep them from talking.

She got ready to go home very soon. She tucked all us money into her little purse and put on her things. I think she dallied around quite a little, so as not to go out with any of the other girls. Anyhow, I know she went out alone at last.

Of course I was shut up in her purse, and so I didn't *see* what happened then; but I could hear, and I could make a pretty good guess. And the first thing I heard was Harry Lenox's voice.

"Ah, ha, my dear, I thought if I stayed here long enough you'd come! Now what do you say to a nice little supper where some one will wait on you, instead of your waiting on somebody?"

But Rosie had given a little frightened cry.

"Oh, no, no! Thank you, Mr. Lenox, but really I couldn't. I—I——"

Then I heard Joe speak up, quiet and cool.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but Miss Dalton has given *me* the privilege of escorting her home this evening. Good night."

The next minute I knew they were walking off together. Dear, dear, but wasn't I glad that Joe was there! And I guess Rosie was, too. Anyhow, she said so. For a minute I could see she was having a little trouble trying to convince Joe that she really was glad, and that Mr. Harry Lenox was nothing whatever to her—except a nuisance and a terror.

But she convinced him after a little, and then how they did talk! She told him all about her life, and the struggles she'd had to get along as far as she had. And he told her all about his struggles, and how he had a real good position now.

As for what happened next, of course you, sir, know this part of the story, for, as I told you, Joe is *you*—only under another name. Of course I was shut up in Rosie's purse, and I didn't know much of anything that was going on for the next few weeks, except as I learned it from her talks with you going home from work at night, when she carried me in her little purse. But, as it happened, she didn't spend me for quite a while, so I knew *some* things.

I knew that Harry Lenox came two or three times again, and that at last he evidently became convinced that his society wasn't desired. I knew that Bobby still bothered some, asking for money. And I knew that you and Rosie were getting very fond of each other. I was with her in her purse the night you proposed to her, and I was so glad to know that, before I had to leave her.

It was very soon after this that she spent me. She put me in the contribution box one Sunday. Maybe you don't remember, but you and she went to church one day when there was a contribution taken up for Christmas baskets for the poor. I knew that Rosie

was poor herself, and that she couldn't afford to give much; but I know that that day she just emptied her purse into her hands—every single cent there was there—and put us all into the contribution box. So that is the way I left Rosie.

Well, I was glad to go help buy the Christmas baskets, of course, and of course there was always my curiosity as to where I was going next. As it happened, I personally did not go to buy the baskets, for the minister wanted some change, and after church he put in a dollar bill and took out a dollar in coins; and I was one of them.

I went home with the minister then, and my life in that minister's family was one of the pleasantest experiences I ever had. It was such a beautiful family, and they were all so happy—in spite of the fact that they didn't have hardly any money.

Everywhere I had been, money—either the possession of it or the lack of it—had seemed to bring so much sorrow and trouble. I was tired of seeing men and women and children fight for it, lie for it, steal for it, live for it, and die for it. And these people—well, they used money as a means to an end, not as an end in itself.

Oh, I could see, of course, that they were poor, and that they didn't have half the things they really ought to have had. The minister's salary was away behind, and it used to make my blood boil to see those richly-dressed parishioners of theirs come in and discuss suppers and fairs, and complain all the time because they had to be called on so often for schemes to raise money. Why didn't they put their hands in their pockets and pay up that back salary?

You see, the way I happened to know all about

these things was that on the very first day that the minister took me home with him, his little daughter was given a new bank, and she asked for some money to put in it. When he had pulled the change out of his pocket, he picked me up, looked me over a little curiously—on account of the circle mark, I suppose—and handed me out to the little girl who promptly dropped me into the bank and put the bank on the mantel-shelf. There were little peep-holes all around the sides of that bank, so all of the rest of the time I stayed there I could see and know everything that was going on in that room. And I saw—a whole lot of things.

As I said, they were a lovely family, and so nice to each other. There was the minister and his wife and two boys and a little girl. I could see that they had to be awfully economical, and that there were a lot of things that they had to get along without. But the only times I ever heard them really bemoan because they didn't have money was when they wanted to give a lot on some subscription paper or to some other kind of good cause.

They had flowers—homegrown—and books and music; and they read aloud evenings to each other while the rest worked. They had a cat and a dog, and they were always having people call who wanted help of some kind—men, women, and children.

It wasn't very often that they could give much money, but they gave some—all they could afford, and more, I knew; and they gave a lot of help in the way of advice and encouragement and good cheer. Anyhow, I noticed that almost everybody felt better after they had been there and had a talk with the minister or his wife.

By and by, after I had been there quite a while, I

heard them beginning to talk about a donation party. The church was going to give them one, it seemed. By degrees, I found out what it was. The parishioners were going to bring them all sorts and kinds of things—food, clothing, anything that they thought would be acceptable.

The minister's family talked a lot about it. I could see it plagued them a little. They acted as if they felt they were almost like charity folks, to have to take food and clothing like that from people. But the minister rebuked them, and told them that that was foolish pride, and that they must not feel that way. But I noticed he sighed and looked real discouraged and tired himself when he said it, and it was plain to be seen he felt like charity folks himself.

The elder boy blurted out that, for his part, if the church would pay up the back salary it really owed them, he wouldn't ask them to give any old donation party.

Both the minister and his wife spoke up very quickly and said "Tut, tut!" at this; but I noticed they exchanged very expressive glances, and I guess they felt about the same as their outspoken son on the matter.

But they hushed him up, and began to talk right away about all the nice things they were going to have; and each one told of something especially wanted, until they got real excited discussing the lovely things they hoped would be brought—cake and pie, and cold chicken and candy and nuts, and nice things that they couldn't afford to buy themselves, and a few books and games, and some pretty dishes for the table, and maybe a new coat for the

minister, and a piece of black silk to make the minister's wife a new dress.

Well, at last the night of the donation party came. It was a lovely evening, from what I heard. Anyhow, the house was jammed full, and as I saw the people flocking in, each with a bundle, I was so glad, for I thought what a lot of nice things the minister's family would have.

They had spread a long table right before the mantel-shelf where I was, so I could see all the things they brought; and I was so glad, for I was very much interested.

Everybody put some sort of a bundle down on the table. A good many of them were done up, but there was quite a lot of food that wasn't done up. I saw one chicken, and several loaves of cake, and two or three boxes of sandwiches. I was so glad of the cakes and the chicken, for I knew they were just what the minister's people wanted; but I couldn't help wondering what in the world they would do with such a lot of sandwiches all at once; and it seemed to me an awfully queer thing to bring to a donation party, anyway.

It was a lot of fun to watch the people come in, and put down their bundles, before going into the bedrooms to take off their wraps. Quite a lot of the people I had seen before, for they had been to the house to missionary meetings, or for advice and comfort. I was looking for Rosie, too. I was pretty sure she would come, for I knew this was her minister, and I had seen her at the house several times on various kinds of church work.

I wondered, too, if she would bring Joe. Well, she did. Pretty soon I saw her come in, and Joe was with her. They each had a bundle, and they

put them down on the table. I noticed especially where they put them, for I wanted to watch when the minister opened them, so as to see what Joe and Rosie had brought.

It was a real jolly party, and everybody seemed to have a good time. Then, about ten o'clock I saw that they were having refreshments. And what do you suppose they were eating? They were eating those cakes and sandwiches—and yes, the chicken—that they had brought to the minister! One after another those boxes and bundles and parcels of food were taken from the table, opened, and passed all around the room.

And how they did eat! Why, I didn't suppose people *could* eat like that. To my certain knowledge one woman ate five little cakes, and there was a man who ate a dozen sandwiches, I guess. I counted up to nine myself, and he was still eating.

At half-past ten you should have seen that table; paper, empty boxes, string, a few broken sandwiches, a chicken picked almost clean, and perhaps a dozen parcels that had not been opened.

They had speeches then. One or two of the deacons got up and said what a pleasant evening they had had, and how glad they were so many turned out and brought in such a generous quantity of donations, and that they couldn't do too much for their minister, and they hoped he would enjoy for a long time all the good things they had brought him. Then the minister got up and thanked them, and said they were very kind. His speech was very polite and proper, but it wasn't very long, and I thought I caught his eyes once or twice dwelling a little wistfully on that mussed-up table.

The people got up then, and began to go into the

bedrooms to put on their things. The minister and his wife went out into the hall to say good-by as they left, and it was then that I noticed Joe and Rosie had come up quite close to the table, and were looking over the things. Then Rosie began to speak, and her voice was all choked up with indignation.

"Joe, look—it's a perfect shame! There isn't a thing here, hardly, that's left for them, only these few small packages over there. Almost every single one of those people just brought something to eat, and they stayed and ate it up. Why, Joe there isn't a *thing* here, hardly. It's a disgrace. I'm just as ashamed as I can be!"

"Well, by Jiminy! I guess you're right," murmured Joe sympathetically, poking over the empty papers on the table.

"And we're 'way behind on his salary," went on Rosie, indignantly; "and we had this donation party to help him out. Great help this is, isn't it? Why, Joe, we've got to do something, we've *got* to! Listen." She was talking to others beside Joe, now. People were coming in from the bedrooms with their wraps on, and pretty soon Rosie had quite a crowd around her. And how she did talk, and how pretty she looked with her dark eyes sparkling, and her cheeks flushed with anger and excitement.

It wasn't long before I found out what she was up to; she was asking for money—cash; and she was getting it, too. Snatching Joe's hat, which he had been holding in his hand, she dropped something in it herself, and then began to pass it around. And there wasn't a single soul in the room but what put in something.

But she didn't stop there. She made Joe go and

take up the attention of the minister and his wife, and then she passed that hat to everybody in the hall, and in all those other rooms. Then breathless and eager, she came back and dumped the money into one of those empty sandwich boxes, and hurried away with Joe.

Well, after awhile everybody was gone, and the minister and his wife and the two boys came in. The little girl was asleep in a big chair, and they let her sleep. Then the rest of them began to untie the packages.

They acted tired and discouraged, and not a bit excited; and I didn't wonder, with that table before them. One boy found one cake and ate it, and another picked off a bit of dark meat he found on the chicken. Then they watched to see what the bundles would bring forth.

And such a collection as there was! Never did I suppose such an entirely useless, uninteresting lot of things could be got together anywhere. There was one crocheted tidy, one tarnished silver picture frame, one pair of gray worsted wristers, one glass pitcher (with a nick in it), one lace tidy, two framed pictures (both ugly), a small squash, a wax wreath under glass, a bag of potatoes, a quart of cranberries, a package of back-number magazines, and a two-dollar glove check, and a handsome book. These last two were the packages Rosie and Joe brought, I was sure.

"Well, I guess that's all," said the minister, trying to speak very cheerfully, "so we'd better be off to bed."

At that moment one of the boys, poking among the empty boxes, found the box of money, and what a shout of joy he gave. What a shout of joy they all

gave, for that matter. And there was really quite a sum there, too. I didn't blame them for feeling glad. It would help a lot toward all those things they were so longing for—and didn't find in the rest of those bundles. It would even help them to forget, maybe, all those things those people brought to eat, and then ate up themselves. A donation party, indeed! If it hadn't been for that money——

Well, at last they all went off to bed, and the room was dark and silent once more, and I had nothing to amuse me but the memory of what I had seen.

It was about a week after the donation party that Rosie came one morning. She had brought two letters, and she said she wanted the minister's advice. She looked worried and distressed, yet there were excitement and a certain sort of happiness in her face.

She told the minister all about her father and her home life, back in the little town where she was born. She told him, too, about her father's drinking, and the women who had come and taken away the twins; and of course that led to the story of how she had left home herself and come to Boston, and of what she had done since she came.

She said that now her father had written her, and wanted her to come home. He was sick and lonely, and he promised never to drink again, if she'd only come and keep house for him. He said he'd got a little money saved up, hoping she'd come, and that the hotel man said he'd be glad to pay her well for part time waiting on table for him. He told about the twins, too. He said they'd been adopted out of the Home where they were put, and that they had a good home now together with a nice family; but that they were so far away he couldn't see them any

more. And now he hadn't anybody left, and wouldn't she please, please come home and comfort the last days of her poor old daddy; that it wouldn't be long, anyway. The doctor said it wouldn't.

Rosie cried a little when she read this letter to the minister, and I could see it touched her deeply.

But that wasn't all she had. There was another letter, too; and that was from the hotel-keeper's wife.

She said that she thought Rosie ought to know about her father, and how feeble he was, and how anxious he was to have his daughter with him for these last few years of his life, and that it might be only months instead of years before he went. And she said that if Rosie *didn't* come she was afraid her father would take to drink again, and perhaps do something desperate. Then she wrote Rosie more about the table work they would be glad to give her, and of what wages they could pay.

Rosie read this letter, too, to the minister, and then, with a long sigh and tear-wet eyes, she said: "And now what shall I do?"

They had a long talk then, she and the minister, and I could see that the minister thought she ought to go, and I could see that Rosie thought so, too, only it was plain to be seen how she dreaded it, though she spoke very kindly of her father, and said that of course if there was anything she could do for him, she wanted to do it. So at last it was decided that she should go; and Rosie said she was going to try very hard to get Bobby to go back with her, too. And she left the house with a brave lifting of her chin, and a determined smile on her lips.

It wasn't two days later that Joe came to see the minister. He said he had come to ask the minister

to try to persuade Rosie *not* to go. He said he had asked her to be his wife, and that he had a good job now and would soon be able to marry her; but that she was determined to go back to her father and take care of him, though Joe said she acknowledged she cared for him (Joe), but thought her first duty now was to her father.

Joe was terribly worked up over it, and couldn't see it that way at all. But he didn't get much comfort out of the minister, for the minister said he thought Rosie was quite right, and was doing just what she ought to do. He said they were both young and could afford to wait till Rosie's father did not need her any longer. But Joe went off almost as disgruntled, I'm afraid, as when he came.

Rosie came again before she went back to her father. She had a beautiful light on her face, and I could see that this sacrifice was going to be the making of her. She told the minister that she had got Bobby to go, too, and that they were both going to leave the next morning.

She spoke of Joe, and said how badly she felt that Joe should not think it was her duty to go to her father now; but that she felt that she must do it—that it was the only thing she could do. And she said that the fact that she had got Bobby to consent to go with her made her feel all the more sure that she was doing just right, for Bobby was getting into a very bad way in the city, and she said she wanted to get him out of it.

And the minister said, yes, he felt so, too, that she was doing just right, and he was very sure Joe would come to see it that way in time. So Rosie went off happy, though there were tears in her eyes.

She wrote very soon after she got there, and the

minister read the letter to his wife down by the table in front of me, so I heard it. Rosie told all about how glad her father was to see her, and how good everybody was to her. She said her father was very feeble, and she was so glad she came. She spoke of Joe, and said she was awfully sorry for him, for he had just lost his job, through no fault of his, and he was feeling particularly blue and abused.

Later, other letters came, and I heard those, too. Rosie wrote all about her work, and told how splendidly her father was keeping from drinking. She said he was picking up a little, too, and seemed much better than when she first got there, so she guessed she was taking good care of him. She wrote of Bobby, and said he was doing well, too, and she was so glad for that. She spoke of Joe in every letter, and asked the minister if he knew anything about him. She said she was troubled over him, and that she didn't like the sound of the letters he wrote her. She said, so far as she knew, he hadn't got a really good job yet, and that she had written him that the biggest merchant in town there would give him a good job, if he'd only come, and would pay his fare up to come and talk to him about it. But Joe wouldn't hear of it a minute. Rosie said Joe was proud, and if he couldn't make good where he was in Boston he wasn't coming back to his home for the boys to laugh at him and crow over him. Then she asked the minister again if he knew anything about him.

I could see that the minister would hate to answer that question, for Joe was not doing well, and the minister knew it. I heard the minister and his wife talking together quite often of Joe. You see, the

minister was keeping track of Joe, and so he knew all about him.

Joe had fallen in with some fellows that weren't good for him to be with, and the minister was afraid he was drinking some. The loss of his position had made him discouraged and ashamed. In fact Joe seemed to be very rapidly going downhill, but naturally the minister didn't want to write this to Rosie.

The minister sent for Joe one evening, and they had a long talk together. The minister told him he was ashamed of him, and Joe said he was ashamed of himself; but that he just couldn't help it—without Rosie. There didn't seem to be anything to live for. Whereupon the minister told him he could live for Rosie as well when she was two hundred miles away as he could if she were right there, if he only knew it. And that it was really all the nobler that he should do it when she was away.

And Joe laughed sheepishly, and nodded his head, and said he'd try, he really would.

The minister asked him why he didn't go up and take that job back in his home town; but Joe shook his head and said no so emphatically that I guess the minister thought it wouldn't do any good to urge it. Joe said he was going to make good down here —or nowhere. Then he went away, and he never came again.

Days and weeks passed, and I still stayed in the bank on the mantel-shelf. From time to time other money was added to me, though always in very small amounts.

I was there when the great war began in August, 1914. I used to see the newspapers with their big headlines, and I used to hear the minister and his

wife and the others talk. When the plea came for help for the poor little Belgian children, I heard all about it, and I didn't wonder that the minister's little daughter cried and asked if she couldn't give them the money in her little bank. She said she wanted to give it all, every single cent.

So we were all emptied out, and it was then my career on the mantel-shelf in the minister's family ended.

My career then, for a time, was very checkered, and not particularly interesting. I believe first I was paid out for condensed milk for the Belgian babies, and then passed through several strictly business changes of buying and selling. I got into politics, too, and regret to say I was part of the price paid one Mike Dugan for his vote.

Mike promptly paid me out for a drink, and my next several owners were bar-room men and boys, till I felt as if I never would get the smell of whiskey off me.

I fell into the hands of jabbering, gesticulating foreigners, too, who hid me in all sorts of remarkable places in their dirty, evil-smelling habitations. I could not understand their language at all, but they seemed to know me all right. Indeed, it really seemed to me quite wonderful—the way they knew the money values of all of us different coins. I saw marriages, feasts, and funerals, all of which were very strange and curious, and I was taken into the most extraordinary restaurants I ever saw.

At last, one day, while tucked in the garments of one of the most outlandish foreigners of the lot, I fell out to the ground and found myself on Boston Common.

It was a bitter cold night, and the ground was

white with snow, though where I fell on the trodden path there was only a little dirty ice.

It was dark, but it was still early in the evening, and it was Christmas time, I knew, for the stores across Tremont Street, in plain view from where I lay, were gay with tinsel stars and the red and green of the Christmas holly. Throngs were passing over me every minute, but I lay for some time unnoticed. Rich and poor, old and young—all sorts and kinds of humanity were abroad that night. But not all were happy. I could see that with half an eye. Nor did all the unhappy faces belong to the rags of poverty. Many a fur-clad figure dragged its feet drearily, and many a handsome plume nodded above a sour, discontented face.

It was when the crowd was beginning to thin out a little that I noticed a man coming slowly along the path. He was a handsome man with a clean-shaven chin, and close-cropped gray hair showing under his hat. He wore an expensive-looking black coat with a fur collar, and he had the air of being prosperous and well-groomed. But he looked anything but happy. His fine mouth was set into stern, almost scornful lines, and his eyes glowed sombrely under his hat brim.

As he came about opposite me, his lagging steps came to a full stop. His eyes, becoming scornful to match his lips, swept the gay scene across the street with cold disapproval. Folding his arms he leaned against a tree-trunk and stood there motionless, his sombre gaze still across the street.

After a minute he dropped his arms, then reached into his pocket and pulled out a tiny, gleaming revolver. The path was deserted now, and there was no one but me to see. His gaze was on the revolver

now, instead of on the street opposite. He seemed to be thinking, musing, wondering and—not happily. He tapped the revolver gently on the palm of his hand, once or twice.

He was still standing there when suddenly up the path I heard the chatter of two children, a boy and a girl. They had almost reached us, and I could see plainly how pinched and blue their little hands and faces were, and how shockingly thin and ragged were their pitiful little garments.

The man pocketed his revolver, and at that moment the little girl gave a shout of glee. A second later I felt her little cold fingers close upon me.

"Oh, Benny, look! money—real money!"

"Honest?" cried the boy; then disappointedly: "Aw, it's only a nickel, Susie!"

"But a nickel'll buy somethin'," maintained the little girl stoutly. "Couldn't we get mammy a little somethin'?"

The boy shook his head. He had taken me in his hand and was examining me curiously.

"No-op—not the things she wants—a new dress, an' shoes, an' some warm flannels, an' a coat. You don't think a nickel'll buy all that, do ye?"

The little girl sighed.

"I s-pose not. But I hoped we could get her *somethin'*. An' 'twould be just the same about daddy an' the rest, wouldn't it? We couldn't get *much* for anybody?"

"No-op. A nickel ain't but five cents, ye know," the boy reminded her. The boy was still studying curiously the little circle mark on my side at the point of the V. "An' this nickel's got a mark on it—maybe 'tain't no good, anyhow."

"Oh, Benny, you don't mean 'tain't worth even

five cents," almost sobbed the little girl. "Why, I was just thinkin'—we *could* get *somethin'*. We could get candy, an' if we got real cheap candy we could get quite a lot, maybe, an' then everybody could have *some*."

"Say, we *could* do that," cried Benny, "an' I reckon the old nickel's good after all. The hole ain't way through. Come on, let's go an' see. Let's go down ter the Five-an'-Ten." And with me tightly clutched in his hand the boy started off.

Across the street, however, attracted by the gay windows, they stopped a minute to look in.

"Oh, Benny, ain't that fur coat be-utiful," sighed Susie. "I choose that for mammy."

"An' I choose the muff—that great big squashy one, an' I choose them little slippers with the gold buckles for Betty, too."

"Oh, yes, an' that be-*u*-tifullest pink dress all silver and spangles. I choose that, too," chimed in Susie. "An' the white shoes, an' that lovely fan. But there ain't anythin' for daddy, here, Benny."

Benny gave a shrug that was cynically expressive way beyond his years.

"No, an' I reckon there ain't anythin' for mammy nor Betty, nor any of the rest of 'em, either—not with this 'ere nickel," he cried. "We ain't Santa Claus, ye know."

"No, but *I* am," broke in a man's voice behind them. "Come on, my dears, we'll go shopping."

Benny gave such a start that he dropped me on the sidewalk, and in that instant I saw that the voice belonged to the stern-looking, gray-haired man with the revolver, only he didn't look stern now, and his revolver was out of sight. His face was alert and

interested, and his eyes had actually a look of fun in them. Then Benny picked me up.

"You mean, with — with our nickel?" he stammered.

"Sure, with your nickel," laughed the man. "Only I'm hoping you'll let me help a little. Now come, let's be moving. It's growing late."

And they were off.

And what an hour it was—and what didn't that man buy!

Oh, to be sure, he didn't buy gold slippers, nor pink spangled dresses; but he bought sensible things and useful things, yes, and frivolous things—if books and flowers and fruit and candy and dolls and games may be called "frivolous." He bought something for every member of the family, and many a something, too. And all the while he was learning all about mammy, who was so tired, and daddy, who was sick, and Betty who was lame, and Teddy, who was blind, and Katie, who wasn't anything only the sweetest little baby in all the world—for Benny and Susie told him. They told him, too, how they had thought they couldn't have any Christmas this year, not even a stick of candy, and that's why they were so pleased to find even me.

And when the three of them had their arms full to overflowing, I still lay moist and uncomfortable in Benny's fist. I had not been spent.

"But we haven't spent our nickel at all," cried Benny, when the man suggested that they start for home. "You hain't let us spend it!"

"But I'm going to let you now," retorted the man, with a chuckle. "I'm going to let you get everything with it."

"You mean, everything that we've got here?" demanded Benny, in open skepticism.

"Every single thing."

"But Benny said we couldn't get anythin'—not anythin'," protested Susie, anxiously. "And now—just look at all these things!"

"Oh, well, Benny didn't know what a very valuable piece of money he had there," retorted the man, with another chuckle.

"But ain't it just a nickel?" demanded Benny, plainly still incredulous.

"To you, yes. But to me—See here, my boy." (There was a new something in the man's voice, a curious depth and earnestness that somehow made me feel very proud, and yet very humble.) "To me that nickel means—a whole lot, and I want it for my very own. To pay you for it I will give you all these things we've bought this evening. Come, is it a bargain? Will you let me have that nickel?"

"Why, y-yes, sir, of course," stammered Benny doubtfully, holding me out in his hand. "Only it seems as if—if somehow, I was—was cheating you; —just a nickel, so."

"But I've told you it wasn't 'just a nickel' to me," said the man. And again I thrilled at the unfathomable something in his voice.

Even the touch of his fingers seemed to mean a whole lot, as he took me gently, and tucked me into a little compartment all by myself in a big leather wallet he carried.

The man got a taxi then and went home with the children, but he didn't wait to hear the thanks of the amazed, delighted family. He just went in with Benny and Susie, dumped his share of the packages on to the table, said he was just playing Santa

Claus, then hurried away in the taxi. And I was in his wallet.

Of course I didn't know where I was going, but I knew I was being carried somewhere, and I knew he wasn't dallying any by the way. Of course I couldn't help wondering, too, why I was worth more than a nickel to him, and I did so hope I was going to find out.

Well, I found out. He went home to his wife, and I heard them talk. It seems that he'd left home that morning in a very bitter frame of mind. "The market" had gone wrong for him, and where he'd been worth a million or two the week before, he was worth but a paltry hundred thousand now. And he didn't like it. Moreover, he'd quarrelled with his wife that morning—and, on the whole, he went off all out of tune with the Christmas spirit, and he just felt that he hated it all. The more he saw of the Christmas crowd and decorations, the more angry he felt, until, by the time he had stopped on the Common he was hardly sane, and was actually meditating taking his own life, so that he might end it all forever.

Then came Benny and Susie, and their finding me. Their brave attempt to make the most of me, and their unconscious showing of how much they really wanted and needed, gave a sudden desire to him to play Santa Claus for them and give them all one good time. Even then he had no intention of abandoning his idea of suicide. But as the evening passed, and he learned more and more of Susie and Benny, and the home life of the little family with its handicaps and poverty, he began to feel ashamed of himself. His own ills and grievances seemed suddenly to grow small and insignificant.

He pictured what they would think of him if he should step out like a coward, leaving his fight half finished. Then is when he suddenly determined that he just couldn't do it. He'd be ashamed to do such a thing.

"And here's the nickel that was at the bottom of the whole thing," he said, taking me from his wallet and holding me out to her in the centre of his palm.

She took me curiously, and looked at me, and there was a very tender expression in her eyes.

"But how did *you* come by this?" she asked.

"Sold them my entire Santa Claus pack for it," he laughed softly. But there was a very tender look in *his* eyes, too. "And so you see, it was this little nickel that kept me from ending the whole thing with—this," he finished, taking the shining little revolver from his pocket and laying it across his hand.

His wife shuddered and covered her eyes with her fingers. Then she reached out quickly and took me in her hands and patted me gently.

"Dear little nickel! How little it knows what it's been to you to-day," she said softly. "And now you'll keep it always, won't you?" she finished.

But the man laughed and shook his head.

"Not much I'll keep it!" he cried, throwing back his shoulders. "Do you suppose I want to be reminded at every turn of how near I came to being a fool? No, sir—that blessed little nickel has served its purpose—and it was a good one. But now I shall get rid of it just as soon as ever I can!"

And he did. The very next day he went into a telephone booth at a railroad station down town and dropped me into the slot. I guess it was nearly a month before the telephone man gathered me up,

and during that time I got stories enough to fill a volume.

You see, I could hear everything, and it *was* funny, sometimes—and sometimes not so funny.

One man got so mad one day because Central gave him the wrong number that I think she gave him three or four more wrong ones, just to get even with him for the way he acted. By the way he talked I guess he was making up faces at her.

I heard the pretty girls talk baby-talk to their beaus, and the young fellows make dates with their sweethearts. I heard men tell their wives that they had got to work at the office that evening till very late—and then heard them chuckle with a friend over the "little game together" that they could have now that the "old lady" was settled.

Twice I heard a robbery reported, and once a fire; and once a sobbing little woman choked out the news of a sudden death. A lisping baby was held up to talk to papa, and that same day a most exciting elopement was arranged. A day later an irate father and an angry mother made the wires fairly sizzle with heated language; and I judged, from what I heard, that 'twas over this same elopement.

At the end of a month I was gathered up with the other nickels by a man; but he left me for change, with the lady at the desk, so very soon I found myself being thrust again into the telephone slot. This time the operator made a mistake, and, though the man got his party all right, I was dumped into the little pocket below the instrument. And there I lay unnoticed until a small boy slyly entered the booth, ran his fingers hastily through the pocket—and ran off with me.

Before night he traded me off for a broken jack-

knife. The boy who had sold the jackknife was a newsboy, and at the end of the day he brought me with other coins to his mother, and she put me in an old tin coffee-pot on the top shelf in the pantry. And there I stayed, and stayed, and stayed. I thought my end had come sure, and that I never would get out again into the blessed light of day. She was a very thrifty woman, and many a dime and nickel were dropped into the old coffee-pot along beside me. She was saving up to buy a little place in the country sometime, I heard her say, but it didn't look to me as if she'd ever get there, and I guess she got discouraged herself. Anyhow, one day she climbed up and got us down, and emptied us out on the table and counted us. There wasn't but little more than fifty dollars—she had to laugh herself at the idea of buying a country place with that!

But what was she going to do now with us was to buy a liberty bond. It seems that our country was in the war now, and our Government wanted everybody to buy a liberty bond. While the woman was looking us over, the newsboy came in and begged for a nickel. He said he wanted to buy a little flag of a fellow he knew. A minute later his mother had picked me out from the pile of money, and the boy was trudging off with me. Pretty soon he traded me off for a little flag, which he proudly stuck in his buttonhole. The boy who had sold him the little flag promptly spent me for candy at the corner store, and before night I was handed out in change to a young fellow who evidently could not make up his mind whether to enlist or not.

When my new owner took me out of his pocket he was standing before a recruiting station on the Com-

mon, and after a minute's hesitation he tossed me up to see whether he should enlist or not.

"Heads I go—tails, I stay," he muttered, as he tossed me up in air and deftly caught me.

I came down heads, and with a shrug he dropped me into his pocket and went into the recruiting tent.

I had all sorts of experiences then, both in Boston and at the camp at Ayer; but I'll skip details for I'm nearing the end of my story.

Suffice it to say that he brought me into Boston one day, and redeemed a coat at a pawn shop with me and quite a lot of other money. Not two days afterward I was handed out to you—Joe.

And now it's up to you. If I'm really your last nickel I judge you've been still going downhill, in spite of the good advice the minister gave you. But even if you have, you don't have to keep on going downhill. Surely the story I've just told you ought to convince you of that. Sometimes even a nickel is a pretty valuable piece of property. It may mean —well, almost anything. You say yourself that you might spend me for a sandwich to keep you going enough to apply for that job, or you could trade me for a drink to bring temporary forgetfulness, or you could spend me for carfare to take you to the river, where you could end it all.

But that wouldn't end it all, sir. Even if you don't believe there is anything beyond the river for you, or for anyone else who falls into the last sleep, there's something right here and now that the river can't end.

First, there's memory in the minds of all your friends—in the mind of Rosie. Do you want always, when Rosie thinks of you in the future, to know she's remembering first and last the cowardly

way you stepped out of life? I don't believe you do.

And then there's influence. The river won't end influence. Suppose you spend me for the river—how about all the other poor fellows who are down and out, and who heard of it, or know of it? Won't it be just a little easier for them to go and do the same thing? On the other hand, how about it, if you brace up now and be a man? And you can, you know. You're not really old. You just think you're old because you've let yourself get so nearly down and out. But you aren't really down and out—not while you've got me.

Hasn't my story taught you something? Hasn't it taught you what a wonderful lot of possibilities there are locked up in just little me? It all depends, you see, on what you choose.

There's the river—but you aren't going to take that. There's the drink—but I don't believe you're even going to take that. And there's the sandwich to keep you going for that job.

But there's a better use yet for me—something which I believe if you do it, will bring you the biggest happiness of all. Now guess—what is it? And if you guess it—will you do it?

With a slow lifting of his head the man woke up, and sat erect. He looked about him wonderingly, dazedly. Then, with a strange light in his eyes he picked up the nickel and gazed at it long and earnestly.

"Well, old chap, how about it?" he muttered. "Which—shall it be?"

THE END

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